HOMELESS FAMILIES IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA: CHARACTERISTICS AND PATTERNS OF EXIT FROM HOMELESSNESS

by

STEPHANIE EICHENBRENNER VANDERFORD

(Under the Direction of Anne L. Sweaney)

ABSTRACT

The research described in this dissertation explores homelessness among families that were clients of A Child's Place in Charlotte, North Carolina from three perspectives. First, it describes in detail a sample of homeless families and compares them to a sample of families that were considered at risk of becoming homeless because they were facing imminent eviction or foreclosure. Second, it uses Cox's proportional hazards model to analyze the effects of various family-level characteristics on families' rates of exit from homelessness. Finally, it explores differences between homeless families that lived in shelters and homeless families that did not live in shelters. One key finding relates to the importance of employment, both in distinguishing homeless families from at-risk families and in helping families exit homelessness. In other important ways, however, homeless families and families at risk of homelessness were very similar. Recommendations for future research are made, including the suggestion that more emphasis should be placed on tracking families throughout their homeless episodes, regardless of where they live.

INDEX WORDS: homeless, family homelessness, event history analysis, exit hazard

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DEDICATION

For my brother, Brian, and my Granddad Ankeney, whose memories will always bring a smile to my face and inspire me to shoot for the stars in all that I do.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Family homelessness is a significant and rapidly growing problem in many cities across the United States. In 2005, a survey of 24 mayors across the nation revealed that families with children accounted for approximately 33% of the American homeless population (Lowe, Slater, Welfley, & Beard, 2005). Furthermore, homeless families' requests for shelter in the 24 surveyed cities increased by an average of 5% from 2004 to 2005. More than 60% of the mayors reported an increase in family homelessness in their city for that time period, and 95% stated that they anticipate homelessness among families in their city to grow in 2006.

Complicating the picture, these statistics deal only with homeless families living in or seeking a place in homeless shelters. No one knows how many families never turn to a shelter for residence. Even among the more than 700 homeless families living in shelters across the nation and surveyed by Nunez and Fox (1999), 4% had lived previously on the street or in abandoned buildings. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many families choose to double up with other households rather than live in shelters. At any point in time, some homeless families are not receiving shelter or other supportive services and, therefore, go uncounted.

Many cities struggle to provide shelter and other services to their large and growing homeless family populations. Emergency shelter administrators in 88% of the surveyed cities indicated that they had to turn families away because they did not have adequate resources to serve them. On average, the mayors estimated that 32% of the shelter requests by families went

unmet in the past year. Additionally, in over one half of the 24 cities surveyed, some families were forced to separate in order to stay in shelters (Lowe et al., 2005).

Cities struggle to meet the needs of their homeless families not only because their numbers are growing but also because the picture of family homelessness changed drastically over the last quarter century. Twenty-five years ago, homelessness among families typically was connected to emergency housing problems or other personal tragedies and tended to occur in the form of brief, isolated episodes. Family homelessness today, however, is indicative of more long-term and deeply set poverty (Nunez, 1996a).

History of Family Homelessness

The current picture of family homelessness began to sharpen throughout the 1970s and 1980s, due to the confluence of several events: Renters' incomes failed to keep pace with average rents; many units of privately owned unsubsidized low-income housing were destroyed or converted; and construction of subsidized housing slowed drastically in the 1980s (Dolbeare, 1992; Wright & Lam, 1987). The declining availability of well-paying jobs for people with low educational levels and decreases in real welfare payments both contributed to the drop in real income among low-income renters (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999). Renters' declining real incomes were revealed in increases in both the family poverty rate (McChesney, 1990; Wright & Lam, 1987) and the demand for low-income housing (Daskal, 1998; Dolbeare, 1992). The aforementioned trends in the housing market meant that the absolute supply of low-income housing fell at a time when subsidies were harder to come by and housing prices were soaring (Daskal, 1998; Dolbeare, 1992; Nunez, 1996b; Wright & Lam, 1987). The net result of these income and housing market dynamics was an affordability gap—an imbalance between the number of families that needed low-income housing and the number of low-income units

available (Dolbeare, 1992; McChesney, 1990). The balance between low-cost rental units and low-income renters that had existed in 1970 (Daskal, 1998; Dolbeare, 1992) was quickly lost.

This affordability gap for low-income renters has persisted. Daskal (1998) estimated the gap at 4.4 million units in 1995. Between 1996 and 1998, an additional 19% (1.3 million units) of the affordable housing supply was lost (Institute for Children and Poverty [ICP], 2001). In 2003, 22% of rental units rented for less than $400 a month, but such units were needed by the 31% of all renter households that earned less than $16,000 that year (The Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2005). In 2005, mayors from a majority of the 24 cities that participated in a survey on hunger and homelessness indicated that the level of requests for housing assistance in their city had increased over the past year (Lowe et al., 2005).

In light of these trends, much of the blame for the rising rate of homelessness among families has been placed on the inadequate supply of low-income affordable housing (Dolbeare, 1992; ICP, 2001; McChesney, 1995; The National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2005; Wright & Lam, 1987). Homeless service providers in each of 25 locations across the country listed the shortage of affordable rental housing as a major contributor to homelessness and an obstacle in getting families into housing (Burt et al., 2002). Specific problems that they cited included low vacancy rates, rising rents, and the destruction of public housing. Among the 24 mayors surveyed in 2005, 19 identified the lack of affordable housing as a major contributor to homelessness in their city. No other explanation was provided by as many mayors (Lowe et al., 2005). As long as this affordability gap exists, low-income families will continue to find themselves at risk of homelessness (Culhane, 2002).

Although discussion of the rise in family homelessness has centered on the mismatch between affordable rental units and low-income renters, the importance of family-level

characteristics also has been noted. Some researchers (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; McChesney, 1990, 1995) have argued that, although the affordable housing shortage is one of the primary causes of family homelessness, personal and situational characteristics can be thought of as selection mechanisms that determine the vulnerability of any given low-income family to becoming homeless. Likewise, although it may be argued that "extreme poverty is the common denominator of the homeless condition" (Burt, 2001, p. 775), individual characteristics typically affect a particular family's experience with homelessness. Such individual characteristics may relate to education, work skills, experiences of domestic violence, parenting skills, foster care history, childcare opportunities, mental health, and independent living skills (ICP, 2001). In light of the wide range of experiences and needs of homeless families, Dolbeare (1992), who emphasized "closing [of] the housing affordability gap" (p. 171) as the most essential element in addressing homelessness, still recommended the use of a comprehensive approach connecting housing and other necessary support.

Today, homelessness of American families is not merely a cyclical problem tied to the strength of the economy; nor is it any longer primarily a short-term problem triggered by family tragedy. Rather, it is a long-term problem with many complex causes and no simple solutions. Increasing the supply of housing that is affordable to low-income Americans is a necessary but likely insufficient approach to addressing family homelessness. Effective homeless services programs must be based on high-quality research that addresses several questions. First, what characterizes homeless families living in a given area, and how do those families differ from other poor, but housed, families in that area? Second, what factors enable certain families to exit homelessness fairly quickly and leave other families more vulnerable to long-term homelessness? In other words, what characterizes homeless families that are able to secure

housing, even in light of the affordability gap? Finally, where are homeless families living, if not in shelters, and how do populations in different living situations differ from one another?

Definition of *Homeless*

Before studying homeless families, the exact meaning of *homeless* must be stated explicitly. Arriving at a complete yet measurable definition of homelessness is difficult. Are only those people actually living on the streets homeless? What about those people staying in shelters or other temporary housing? Should families living doubled up with others be considered homeless, near homeless, precariously housed, or something else altogether? Researchers have answered questions like these in many different ways.

In an attempt to lessen some of the confusion over who is and who is not actually homeless, Argeriou, McCarty, and Mulvey (1995) set out to clarify an operational definition of homelessness. For two years, beginning in August 1988, homeless adults entering six public detoxification centers in Boston were asked questions regarding the duration of their homelessness and their dwelling place(s) during homelessness. The questions identified 18 specific types of dwelling places. Based on their final sample of 839 homeless individuals, the researchers concluded that homelessness is actually a continuous, rather than a binary, variable and that different individuals were at different points along a continuum between homeless and nearly homeless. Said in another way, "the choice [homeless people make] is between different states of homelessness: staying at a friend's house, sleeping on the streets, spending the night in a shelter" ("The homeless," 1994-5, p. 50).

However, researchers and practitioners often do not have the luxury of considering homelessness as a continuum. They must eventually draw a line between people who are homeless and, therefore, can be included in research or are eligible for services, and people who

are not homeless. As a guide for practitioners, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 outlined a definition of homelessness. A homeless person is someone "who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (Sec. 103(a)) or someone who:

> has a primary nighttime residence that is: (a) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. (Sec. 103(a))

In 2001, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act provided an even broader definition of homelessness pertaining to children and youth. Specific situations in which children and youth would be considered homeless include when they:

> are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement…[or] are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. (Sec. 725(2)(B))

Most researchers' definitions have not included all individuals or families considered homeless under either of the McKinney-Vento Acts, primarily because it is often impossible to collect data on people from such a wide range of circumstances. Therefore, research results—from this dissertation and from past research—must be interpreted within the context of the relevant operational definition of homeless. For greater convenience in studying homeless

families, researchers often have limited their operational definitions of homeless to families residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or welfare hotels (Bassuk, Weinreb, Buckner, Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1996; ICP, 2000; Johnson, McChesney, Rocha, & Butterfield, 1995; Rocha, Johnson, McChesney, & Butterfield, 1996; Shinn, Knickman, Ward, Petrovic, & Muth, 1990; Wong, Culhane, & Kuhn, 1997). In other cases, families living doubled up with friends or family (Letiecq, Anderson, & Koblinsky, 1996, 1998) or those receiving non-residential services targeted to homeless families (Nunez, 2000) also were included in research.

In some instances, more specific definitions of homeless have been used. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) counted as homeless any families that slept in one or more of certain environments in the 30 days before their interview. The sleeping conditions considered as homeless were: on the street or in another unconventional accommodation (such as a vehicle or abandoned building), in any temporary shelter, or in a hotel or motel paid for by a voucher. The national research conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999) also considered all of those living arrangements, as well as transitional housing, to be indicative of homelessness, but they only looked at the previous seven days. In addition, they included families that, in the past week, had not lived in a residence that they had maintained as their own for at least 30 days. Finally, homeless families included those that would not be able to stay in their current residence for the next month because they were facing eviction, foreclosure, or being kicked out of doubled-up arrangements.

The research described in this dissertation utilized the broad definition of homelessness presented in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001. The data source was chosen specifically to allow for the inclusion of homeless families from a wide range of living accommodations. The sample of homeless families includes families living

in unconventional accommodations (such as vehicles, abandoned buildings, and public areas), emergency shelters, transitional housing, motels, and doubled-up arrangements. Families facing imminent foreclosure or eviction were considered at risk of homelessness.

Definition of *Family*

Identifying which configurations of people qualify as a family is also necessary before studying homelessness among families. Again, researchers' definitions must be kept in mind when interpreting and comparing results. For research that was conducted only at shelters, transitional housing facilities, and welfare hotels specifically for homeless families (ICP, 2000; Rocha et al., 1996; Shinn et al., 1990; Wong et al., 1997), all groups of people admitted to those facilities were considered families. Nunez (2000) also included families that were split up with the parent(s) in a shelter and the child(ren) living temporarily with another relative or friend. Johnson et al. (1995) defined a family as one or more adults living with one or more children, whereas the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999) included only adults living with at least one of their *own* minor children. Bassuk et al. (1996) sampled only female-headed families (married or unmarried) that included at least one of the mother's children under the age of 17. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) restricted their definition to unmarried women with children. Finally, Letiecq et al. (1996, 1998) limited their study to mothers with at least one preschooler, aged three to five years and enrolled in Head Start.

The research described in this dissertation utilized a limited definition of family, based on the eligibility requirements of the organization where data were obtained. That organization works only with families that include at least one child enrolled in a particular city's public school system. Children may be enrolled in any grade from Pre-K through 12th grade, but the organization places an emphasis on identifying homeless students and students at risk of

homelessness in the Pre-K and elementary levels. Implications of the use of such a limited definition of family are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Overview of the Research

The research described in this dissertation was based in Charlotte, North Carolina, a city where the homeless family population approaches one half of the total homeless population and appears to be growing faster than homeless family populations in other cities across the country. The city's mayor reported that 45% of people who stayed in the city's shelters in the year 2005 were members of homeless families with children. Between 2004 and 2005, Charlotte reported a 10% increase in requests for emergency shelter by families—twice the average rate of increase among 24 cities nationwide. Additionally, Charlotte was one of the cities surveyed in 2005 in which shelter administrators reported turning away families because of a lack of resources and splitting up other families in order to provide them with shelter (Lowe et al., 2005). In fact, in the summer of 2004, shelters in the Charlotte area were turning away families at a higher rate than they had in years (Smolowitz, 2004).

Based on a desire to include homeless families living in many different living arrangements, families were sampled from the case files of A Child's Place, which is an organization that provides supportive services to homeless families and families at risk of homelessness. Because A Child's Place is not a residential program, it is able to work with homeless families living in any homeless situation, such as shelters, transitional housing, motels, unconventional accommodations, and doubled-up arrangements. In addition, families may remain clients as long as they are homeless or struggling to maintain stable housing, regardless of whether they move. While clients at A Child's Place, families can receive many types of

assistance, such as donations of school supplies or clothing, help completing applications for food stamps or other benefits, and assistance locating affordable housing.

A Child's Place was created to provide support for homeless families and at-risk families with school-age (Pre-K through 12th grade) children enrolled in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) public school system. The exact population served and the means of providing services have changed since its founding in 1989 (Yon & Mickelson, 2002). Since 1997, A Child's Place has operated by receiving client referrals from other agencies and from teachers and social workers in CMS schools. Once referred, families can choose whether or not they wish to work with A Child's Place. The sample for this research comprises the majority of families (both homeless and at-risk) that became clients of A Child's Place between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005.[1] All families from that time period with available paper case files at the time of data collection were included in the sample; it is possible that a very small number of families' files were lost or destroyed before data collection commenced. Case files were available for a total of 245 homeless families and 109 families at risk of homelessness.

Both paper and electronic files were accessed to collect the data, so the data collection process exhausted all recorded information on families from A Child's Place. The primary source of data was various paper intake forms that are completed when a family begins working with A Child's Place. Examples of the three most commonly used forms are provided in Appendix A. That information was supplemented with information from any other papers in a family's file, when available, which included copies of applications for monetary assistance from other agencies, requests for school supplies, and case notes from meetings between the family

[1] Families that were clients on two or more separate occasions during that time period were only included in the data for their last client episode.

and the social worker, among other things. When available, electronic files were used to crosscheck information from families' paper files.

Several different types of information were obtained from clients' case files. Demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral characteristics of the members of the families were recorded. Examples include family composition, employment status(es) of the adult(s), and drug abuse history(ies) of the adults, respectively. In addition, the conditions surrounding a family's homelessness or housing instability also were recorded. These include problems the family was experiencing, needs they had, where they were living, how long they had been living there, and information about when and where they moved while they were a client. Using these data, a threefold approach was taken to learn about the sample of clients from A Child's Place.

Describing Homeless Families

Chapter 3 presents a descriptive analysis of the homeless families, as well as a comparative analysis between the homeless families and the at-risk families. Demographic (*i.e.*, race and marital status) and socioeconomic (*i.e.*, income and educational level) characteristics of the homeless families are described using means and standard deviations for continuous variables and frequency distributions for categorical variables. In addition, information on the families' previous living arrangements, where they lived while they were homeless, and the duration of their homelessness is presented. Percentages of families indicating various needs (such as medical care or transportation) and problems (such as domestic violence) also are reported. The second component of the analysis compares characteristics of the homeless families to characteristics of the at-risk families, using *t* tests for continuous variables and *chi square* tests for categorical variables.

Modeling Families' Exits from Homelessness

Chapter 4 describes the results of an event history analysis of the homeless families' exits from homelessness. Explanatory variables of primary interest were pulled from the literature, as described in Chapter 2. The main purpose of the event history analysis was to model the relationships between various family-level characteristics and a family's hazard rate of exiting homelessness. Because of concerns about possible bias in the sample of White homeless families, the final analysis was conducted using only Black and Hispanic families. Potential problems due to possible informative censoring also were explored.

Comparing Homeless Families Living in Different Environments

Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a methodological inquiry. All researchers must make certain decisions about their definitions, variables, and samples; the purpose of this analysis was to assess the impact of one particular decision. Much past research has been based on samples of homeless families living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or welfare hotels only. Because this research was based on a much broader definition of homeless, it was possible to determine whether or not families that stayed in those types of shelters differed from families that did not. Of particular interest is the question of whether the two groups of families had different exit hazard rates, *ceteris paribus*.

Overview of the Literature

A complete review of the relevant literature is provided in Chapter 2. Two primary areas of literature are reviewed: descriptive studies of homeless families (including comparisons to other populations) and studies of families' exits from homelessness. A brief overview of each of these topics is provided here. In addition, one article that involved comparisons among homeless families living in different arrangements, including those living doubled up, is also reviewed.

Describing Homeless Families

Researchers have taken various approaches to describing homeless families. Some have presented summary statistics for different samples of homeless families (Burt, 2001; ICP, 2000; Nunez, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999). Others have compared homeless and low-income housed families and highlighted the differences between the two groups (Bassuk et al., 1996; Johnson et al., 1995; Letiecq et al., 1996, 1998). Still others have drawn comparisons between homeless families and homeless individuals (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999; Wong & Piliavin, 1997a). This research took the first two approaches, but literature related to the third perspective also is reviewed as a way of justifying the consideration of homeless families as a distinctive group.

Modeling Families' Exits from Homelessness

Four studies (Rocha et al., 1996; Shinn et al., 1990; Wong et al., 1997; Wong & Piliavin, 1997a, 1997b) that modeled homeless families' lengths of homelessness or their odds or hazard of exiting homelessness are reviewed. Due to their disparate goals and methods, as well as their different definitions of homeless, family, and exit, it is difficult to compare their results. However, some general trends can be identified. Variables that exhibited significant relationships with either the length of a family's homeless spell or their odds or hazard of exiting homelessness in more than one of these four studies are: race, family size (number of children and/or adults), whether or not the family was homeless due to domestic violence, whether or not a household member was pregnant, the amount of cash assistance received, and the year in which the family became homeless. Additionally, the advantages of the event history analysis approach taken by two groups of researchers (Wong et al., 1997; Wong & Piliavin, 1997a, 1997b) are explored.

Comparing Homeless Families Living in Different Environments

Most research related to homeless families has focused on families living in emergency shelters and possibly also other similar arrangements, such as transitional housing or welfare hotels. When families living in unconventional places, motels, or doubled-up arrangements have been included in research, they typically have been grouped together with families living in shelters, and the possibility that the groups differed in significant ways has not been explored. One study (Letiecq et al., 1998) drew comparisons among families living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and doubled-up arrangements.

Significance of the Research

The research presented in this dissertation contributes to the body of research in several ways. First, the bulk of homeless-related research deals exclusively with homeless individuals who do not have children in their care. Comparatively, relatively little research has been done related to the experiences of homeless families. Any research related to homeless single adults[2] is likely to paint a very different picture than would research on homeless families, as it is commonly believed that experiences of homelessness among members of the two groups are fundamentally different phenomena.

Second, even those researchers who have studied homeless families have tended to concentrate in areas other than those focused on in this research. Much past research has attempted to find the causes of homelessness or identify the effects of homelessness on children's behavior or school performance. This dissertation adds to the literature on families'

[2] The term *homeless single adults* is used in contrast to *homeless families*. *Single* does not refer to marital status, but rather to the fact that the adult is homeless without any children in his or her care. This usage is consistent with that in previous research.

exits from homelessness, which can have important policy implications for addressing homelessness.

Third, the research for this dissertation involves a sample that is very different from those used in most past research. On a basic level, the city studied—Charlotte, NC—is one in which homeless families have not been researched so thoroughly. The descriptive and comparative analyses presented in Chapter 3, as well as the event history analyses of Chapters 4 and 5, are the first of their kind for Charlotte. In addition, most previous research has focused almost exclusively on families living in or requesting to stay in homeless shelters. The source of data for this dissertation allowed for a much broader definition of homelessness. A Child's Place utilizes the definition of homeless from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, which means that clients may be living in a wide range of homeless situations, including doubled-up arrangements.

A final contribution is the exploration of an important methodological question. Does it matter if only homeless families living in shelters are studied, or are families living, for example, in doubled-up arrangements fundamentally different? The results of the third essay provide guidance for future researchers as they make decisions about who will be counted as homeless in their research.

Limitations of the Research

Although this research makes many important contributions, it also suffers from limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. Limitations related to the sample are discussed below. Additional limitations related to variables in the data are discussed where relevant in Chapters 3-5.

Results from this research are generalizable only to the population of homeless families residing in Charlotte, NC who obtain the services of A Child's Place. Clearly, results cannot be applied to homeless families in other cities. More importantly, conclusions cannot be generalized to other homeless families in Charlotte because those families may differ fundamentally from client families at A Child's Place. In particular, due to client restrictions at A Child's Place, only homeless families (and families at risk of homelessness) with children enrolled in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System had the possibility of being included in the sample. Homeless families with only[3] younger children may have fundamental differences—both in their characteristics and in their exit patterns—than these families. This limitation is particularly troubling in light of evidence that many homeless children are younger than school-age (Burt, 2001; ICP, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999). Despite the severity of this limitation, A Child's Place was chosen as the source of data because of the broad definition of homeless. Therefore, there was a tradeoff between the operational definitions of homeless and family in selecting the data source.

A similar limitation is one experienced by almost all researchers of homeless families. What can be said about homeless families is limited to what we know about families that manage to remain intact, with all family members living together. Families that are split up, especially for long periods of time, due to homelessness typically cannot be included in research because they cannot be identified as families (Shinn & Bassuk, 2004). A small number of families living split up during their homelessness is included in the sample for this research, but such families are almost definitely underrepresented.

[3] Many of the homeless families from A Child's Place did include young children in addition to school-age children: 15% of the homeless children from A Child's Place were under the age of four, and an additional eight percent were four years old.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research related to three broad areas—corresponding to the topics for Chapters 3-5, respectively—is reviewed in this chapter. Those areas of research are: descriptions of homeless families (including comparisons to other groups), models of families' exits from homelessness, and comparisons of families living in different environments. The relevant definitions of homeless and family for each piece of research discussed were already explained in Chapter 1.

Descriptions of Homeless Families

What types of families are homeless? How do homeless families differ from other poor, but housed, families? How do they differ from single homeless individuals? There are no definitive answers to these questions, but various researchers have attempted to address all of them. The last of these questions is considered first, as its answer helps to justify the consideration of homeless families as a group that is distinctive from homeless individuals.

Differences Between Homeless Families and Homeless Individuals

As anecdotal evidence and counts of homeless people began to indicate the growing presence of families among the U.S. homeless population, researchers became interested in how these families differed from homeless individuals. Research drawing comparisons between homeless families and homeless individuals has led to two general conclusions: The two groups are, in fact, distinct subpopulations that differ in many ways, and homeless families may have more in common with other low-income families than with homeless individuals.

In 1996, the U.S. Bureau of the Census undertook a large national study of homelessness, which is described in detail later in this chapter. One component of this research was a comparison of characteristics and experiences of the homeless based on family composition (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). Homeless families and individuals in the sample differed in many ways. Adults in homeless families were more likely than homeless single adults to be female and married and were also, on average, younger than homeless single adults. Homeless women with children were less likely than homeless single women to be White, whereas homeless men with children were more likely than homeless single men to be White. Both men and women with children reported, on average, lower educational levels than their single counterparts. In addition, homeless families with children were more likely than homeless individuals to be in a relatively short (six or fewer months) homeless spell and were more likely to be in their first homeless spell. Compared to homeless singles, homeless families were more likely to use homeless shelters or transitional housing and less likely to stay in places not meant for habitation (such as on the street or in a car). In addition, homeless families used soup kitchens at lower rates than did homeless individuals. Finally, homeless families had, on average, higher incomes than homeless individuals, which is at least in part a factor of the greater availability of certain benefits to families with children.

Wong and Piliavin (1997a) also drew comparisons among the homeless subsamples—single women, single men, and women with children—they studied in their longitudinal research. Again, many differences existed between the homeless families and the homeless individuals. Homeless families had been homeless for shorter periods of time, on average, and were less likely to have been homeless previously. Homeless women with children were, on average, younger than homeless single adults and were less likely to have health problems that

limited their activities or to have alcohol abuse problems. Homeless single men reported more extensive employment histories than did homeless women with children, and homeless women with children were less likely than all homeless single adults of being currently employed. Homeless families received, on average, more support from social services than did single adults. Finally, homeless families exited homelessness at faster rates than homeless individuals, and they also appeared to have greater access to housing subsidies.

Research comparing homeless families with children to homeless individuals confirms what many people may have suspected: the two groups differ in many ways. Because of these substantial differences, the consideration of homeless families as a distinct group to be studied is justified. In fact, based on her results, Burt (2001) emphasized "the importance of looking at subgroups among homeless populations" (p. 747).

Characteristics of Homeless Families

Cross-sectional studies with the goal of describing specific segments of the homeless family population have been conducted by many researchers across the nation. Most of this research has focused on small geographical areas, such as cities or counties, and is unlikely to be generalizable to other localities. This literature review focuses on the results of two national studies and one regional study that involved shelters in North Carolina, among other Southern states. Results are summarized in Table 2.1 and are discussed in the remainder of this section.

In October and November of 1996, the U.S. Bureau of the Census conducted the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) to gain information on homeless assistance programs (HAPs) and the clients who use them (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). Seventy-six geographic areas (Metropolitan Statistical Areas or rural counties) were selected to represent the United States. Within those geographic areas, HAPs were

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Three Samples of Homeless Families

Characteristic Type	Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999	Nunez, 2000	Institute for Children and Poverty, 2000
Demographics	84% female		94% female
	41% never married; 23% married; 23% separated; 13% divorced		84% single
	43% Black; 38% White; 15% Hispanic		50% Black; 44% White
	average number of children = 2.2		average age = 32
	42% of children under age 6		average number of children = 2
			36% of children under age 5
Education, Employment, and Income	53% less than a high school diploma; 27% some education beyond high school		77% high school diploma
	29% employed within the past month		42% employed
	average monthly income = $475		average length of employment = 6 months
	80% received at least one means-tested benefit		28% never received welfare; 16% received welfare for more than 2 years
	72% received food stamps		
Descriptions of Homelessness	50% in first homeless episode	73% in first homeless episode	58% in first homeless episode
	most common (48%) location was transitional housing	average length of homeless spell = 10 months	average length of homeless spell = 11 months
		average number of residences per year = 3	
Problems	22% were homeless because unable to pay rent	55% of children transferred schools in past year	14% of adults had been in foster care
	50% reported food problems	47% experienced domestic violence	8% of adults were homeless as children
			65% experienced domestic violence
			29% had substance abuse problems

randomly sampled, and within the selected HAPs, clients were randomly selected for interviews. In all, 4,207 adult clients were interviewed, 2,938 of whom were currently homeless. About 15% of households included children under the age of 18.

Selected characteristics of the homeless families with children from the NSHAPC are shown in Table 2.1 (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). Most (84%) respondents from family households were female. Regarding marital status, 41% had never been married, 23% were married, 23% were separated, and 13% were divorced. The racial/ethnic distribution of respondents was 43% Black, 38% White, 15% Hispanic, and 4% other. The homeless families included an average of 2.2 children per family, and 42% of the children were five years old or younger. Over one half (53%) of the respondents had less than a high school education, whereas 27% had some education beyond high school. Less than one third (29%) of respondents had worked for pay in the previous month. The mean family income over the previous month was $475, and nearly 80% of respondents received at least one means-tested benefit. One half of the families were in their first homeless episode. Among current living conditions, the most common (reported by 48% of respondents) was transitional housing, and the least common (2%) was any place not meant for habitation, such as on the street. The most common reason for homelessness, which was stated by 22% of those surveyed, was an inability to pay their rent. Approximately half of all families reported food problems, despite the fact that 72% received food stamps. Burt (2001) concluded that extreme poverty seemed to be the most important vulnerability for homelessness among families.

Among the families sampled in the NSHAPC, some significant differences existed between those headed by males and those headed by females (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). For example, male household heads were more likely than female household heads to be

White and to be married or cohabiting. Male-headed households were more likely to be living in transitional housing, whereas female-headed households were more likely to be living in emergency shelters. Women with children were more likely to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) than were men with children.

Another national study, conducted in 1999, focused on homeless families in 20 cities (Nunez, 2000). A total of 1,904 homeless parents were sampled, primarily from homeless shelters and transitional housing facilities, but some other families receiving nonresidential homeless support services also were included. The average length of the families' current homeless spells was 10 months, and 27% of families had been homeless one or more times previously. The average number of residences per year was three. Domestic violence was a problem—or had been a problem in the past—in 47% of the families. Much of the results pertained to the impacts of homelessness on children, including the fact that 55% of homeless children had transferred schools in the previous year.

On a smaller scale, the Institute for Children and Poverty (2000) surveyed 202 homeless families from 14 shelters in North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Almost all (94%) of the adults surveyed were female, and 84% reported being single. One half of the adults surveyed were African American, and nearly as many (44%) were White. The average adult age was 32, and fewer than one fifth (19%) were under 25 years old. The sample had an average of two children per family, and 36% of children were under five years of age. About three out of every four adults (77%) had at least a high school education. Only 42% were employed at the time of the survey, and the average length of employment was only six months. Twenty-eight percent had never received welfare, and only 16% had received it for more than two years. The remaining 56% of families had received welfare for two or fewer years. The average length of

the homeless spell was 11 months, but fewer than one half (42%) had been homeless previously. Although many of the adults reported characteristics that may be seen as risk factors for homelessness (14% were previously in foster care, 8% were homeless when they were children, 65% reported domestic violence abuse, and 29% were seeking counseling for substance abuse), the main impediment to stable and permanent housing seemed to be a limited income. On average, families needed to earn 20% more than their income to be able to afford to meet their basic needs.

These three studies described three very different samples of homeless families, so it is not surprising that some characteristics (educational level and employment status, for example) of the samples differed. However, several characteristics were similar across two or more of the studies. The majority of homeless adults were unmarried women, the most represented racial group was Blacks, young children were heavily represented, and most families had very low incomes. In addition, one half or more of homeless families were homeless for the first time. The results of these studies paint detailed pictures of family homelessness overall across the nation and in one Southern region, but nothing can be said about any particular city based on these aggregated data.

Differences Between Homeless and Low-Income Housed Families

Homeless families also can be characterized by identifying significant differences between them and low-income housed families. Many such studies have been conducted in various U.S. cities. Three of the most recent are considered here. First, Johnson et al. (1995) compared 188 families from two St. Louis, Missouri shelters in 1989 with 2,000 St. Louis families with incomes below the federal poverty level. Second, Bassuk et al. (1996) compared 220 homeless families and 216 never-homeless families that were receiving AFDC and were

interviewed between August 1992 and July 1995. All families lived in Worcester, Massachusetts, were female-headed (married or unmarried), and included at least one child under the age of 17. Finally, Letiecq et al. (1996, 1998) compared homeless and low-income housed families, all of which were female-headed and included at least one child of preschool age (3-5 years) enrolled in a Head Start program in the Baltimore/Washington, DC area. The sample comprised 92 homeless families and 115 low-income housed families. Results from these three studies are summarized in Table 2.2 and are discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this section.

Johnson et al. (1995) collected information on both groups of families on the following eight characteristics: race, family composition, marital status, educational level of the household head, family size, age of female adult in the household, annual income, and annual receipt of AFDC. Data on the homeless families were obtained from their case records, and data on the comparison sample were obtained from the 1990 Census St. Louis Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). *T* tests and *chi square* tests identified significant differences between the two groups of families on most variables. Homeless families were more likely to be headed by Black persons and single mothers than were low-income housed families. Homeless parents were more likely than low-income housed parents to be single or separated. Homeless families averaged fewer adults per household than did low-income housed families. Homeless women were, on average, younger than low-income housed women. Finally, homeless families had, on average, lower annual incomes but higher annual AFDC payments than low-income housed families. There was no significant difference between the two groups in educational level or number of children in the household.

Bassuk et al. (1996) interviewed each family in their sample three or four times; the interviews took place at the homeless shelter, at a community group's office, or at the family's

Table 2.2

Comparisons Between Homeless Families and Low-Income Housed Families

Study	Differences	No differences
Johnson et al., 1995	Black (+)	educational level
	single (+)	number of children
	number of adults (–)	
	age of family head (–)	
	income (–)	
	AFDC payments (+)	
Bassuk et al., 1996	Black (+)	Hispanic
	age of family head (–)	marital status
	pregnant adult (+)	number of children
	income (–)	employment status
	receipt of AFDC (–)	
	receipt of food stamps (–)	
	receipt of child support (–)	
	less than a high school education (+)	
	number of moves in previous two years (+)	
Letiecq et al., 1996, 1998	married or cohabiting (–)	race
	number of adults (–)	age of family head
	educational level (–)	number of children
	length of time in current residence (–)	employment status
	level of social support (–)	

Note. For continuous variables, a positive (negative) sign indicates a higher (lower) average for homeless, compared to housed, families. For indicator variables, a positive (negative) sign indicates that homeless families are more (less) likely than housed families to have that characteristic.

house. All family members were interviewed about a wide range of demographic, economic, psychological, social, and health characteristics and issues, and many differences between the

two groups of families were found. Homeless mothers were more likely than low-income housed mothers to be Black and less likely to be White. About 42% of both homeless and housed mothers were Hispanic. On average, homeless mothers and their children were younger than their housed counterparts, and homeless mothers were more likely to be pregnant. Compared to low-income housed mothers, homeless mothers had lower average incomes and were less likely to receive AFDC, food stamps, or child support. Homeless mothers were more likely than housed mothers to have not graduated from high school. Homeless families had moved, on average, twice as many times in the past two years as low-income housed families. Significant differences between the homeless and housed samples were not found in relation to marital status, number of children, or employment status.

Letiecq et al. (1996, 1998) collected data from mothers via interviews, either in the homeless shelter or at the Head Start location. Mothers were interviewed about demographic information and three components of social support: social embeddedness, perceived social support, and enacted support.[4] No significant differences between homeless and low-income housed mothers were identified in terms of race, age, number of children, or employment status, but other comparisons revealed significant differences. Homeless mothers were less likely than low-income housed mothers to be married or cohabiting and also had, on average, fewer adults living with them. The average educational level among homeless mothers was lower than that among low-income housed mothers. On average, homeless mothers had lived in their current residences for only about 14% as long as low-income housed mothers had. Significant

[4] Social embeddedness was measured by the size of a mother's social network, as represented by her reported number of friends and family members and number of adult conversations she had in an average day. Perceived social support was measured by the number of people a mother reported she could count on and the number of people she could trust to watch her children. Finally, enacted support was measured with the Family Support Scale (FSS), an 18-item interviewer measure, which had been developed and tested previously (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81).

differences related to social support also were found. In a typical week, the average homeless mother saw or talked to fewer relatives or friends than her average low-income housed counterpart. Homeless mothers reported fewer people they could count on for help, including fewer people who could watch their children. In the past six months, homeless mothers had received less assistance than had low-income housed mothers from their overall social support networks.

The results of these three comparisons of homeless and low-income housed families lend support for several differences and a couple of similarities between the two types of families. Homeless parents seem to be more likely than low-income housed parents to be Black, to be single or separated, and to have had frequent moves. In addition, homeless parents appear, on average, to be younger and less educated and to have lower incomes than their housed counterparts. There is not support for any difference in the number of children or the employment status of the household heads. Finally, although not previously discussed, Burt (2001) compared the food security of the homeless families in the NSHAPC to that of all poor U.S. households in 1995 and found that homeless families were much more likely to experience hunger and food insecurity.

The Need for More Research

Research describing homeless families and comparing them to other groups has led to several important conclusions. First, homeless families do appear to constitute a subgroup distinct from homeless single individuals. Second, homeless families seem to have both similarities with and differences from low-income housed families. Finally, although some characteristics of homeless families, such as primarily being headed by women, are common

across samples, other characteristics tend to vary—sometimes to a large extent—when families are sampled from very different geographic areas.

Further descriptive and comparative research related to homeless families is needed, especially in cities where such research has not been conducted. Homeless service providers cannot rely on data from other locations as accurate portraits of the homeless populations they are serving. Charlotte, North Carolina is one such city where a thorough descriptive study of homeless families has not been conducted. Understanding the characteristics of homeless families is necessary before it will be possible to design the most effective policies to assist them. The results of the descriptive component to this dissertation hopefully can help shape the ways in which policies are targeted to homeless families in Charlotte.

Models of Families' Exits from Homelessness

Researchers have begun to consider a wide array of research questions regarding homeless families. As already discussed, some researchers have focused on describing characteristics of homeless families (Burt, 2001; ICP, 2000; Nunez, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999) or comparing homeless families to low-income housed families (Bassuk et al., 1996; Johnson et al., 1995; Letiecq et al., 1996, 1998) or homeless individuals (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999; Wong & Piliavin, 1997a). The identification of the predictors or causes of family homelessness has been another popular area of research (for example, Bassuk et al., 1997). However, a slightly different approach—that of studying homeless families' exits from homelessness—may produce more meaningful results.

Advantages of Studying Exits from Homelessness

Studying currently homeless families and their transitions out of homelessness provides certain advantages over studying predictors of homelessness. Dworsky and Piliavin (2000)

explained the methodological advantages, as well as the potential for more meaningful results, when researching exits from homelessness, compared to causes of homelessness. First, they noted that the majority of studies exploring the causes of homelessness have used an *ex post facto* cross-sectional design, which suffers from the potential problem of ambiguity of causal order. Even quasi-experimental designs often fail to determine whether certain characteristics cause homelessness or are consequences or correlates of the condition. Dworsky and Piliavin (2000) advocated models of transitions out of homelessness partly because there is no such concern over ambiguity of causal order. Rather, observed events can be sequenced regarding their timing in relation to homeless episodes and exits. Second, sampling frames can be defined clearly, and sample sizes need not be large because homelessness transitions are common. The National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, for example, revealed that only 13% of homeless families had been homeless for more than two years, whereas nearly 50% had been homeless for three months or fewer (The Urban Institute, 1999).[5]

Despite the advantages presented by Dworsky and Piliavin (2000), few researchers have taken the approach of studying families' exits from homelessness. Additionally, some research has used less-than-ideal methods for modeling exits. Two of these studies are reviewed to allow a contrast with the modeling possibilities of the ideal approach of event history analysis. Then results of two event history analyses of families' exits from homelessness are reviewed. First, the meaning of *exit* is explored in the contexts of both past research and the research for this dissertation.

[5] These results also should be considered in light of the fact that the authors point out that such a single-time sampling of homeless families has the disadvantage of *oversampling* those with *long* homeless episodes.

Definition of an Exit

Researchers have assumed different degrees of specificity in defining what constitutes an exit in their studies of transitions out of homelessness. Rocha et al. (1996) modeled families' odds of exiting homeless shelters into permanent housing, as opposed to temporary housing. Shinn et al. (1990) counted all families who left homeless shelters for any reason as having exited officially. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) employed a specific operational definition for exits. They considered exits to be only non-institutional (*i.e.*, not to a hospital or a jail) transitions out of homelessness that lasted for at least 30 days. They did not include institutional transitions because exits to hospitals and jails were deemed out of the control of the homeless persons. Wong et al. (1997) used the same 30-day minimum requirement, but they included all forms of exits. The purpose of the 30-day requirement was to count as exits only those departures that were somewhat stable.

The research described in this dissertation considered all non-institutional departures from homelessness to be exits. Because of the broad definition of homeless, including families living doubled up, exits could only happen in the form of families' moves into their own (rented or owned) permanent housing. No minimum requirement was set for the length of official exits from homelessness because the data typically did not track families once they exited homelessness.

Models of the Odds of Exiting Homelessness or the Length of Homelessness

Two approaches to studying families' exits from homelessness are to model their odds of exiting or the length of time that they are homeless. While these approaches have their disadvantages, results from one study of each type are reviewed so the methods can be contrasted

with event history analysis techniques. Significant results from these two studies are shown in Table 2.3 and are discussed below.

Table 2.3

Selected Results on the Odds of Exiting Homelessness and the Length of Homelessness, Among Families

Study	Variables significantly related to	
	odds of exiting homelessness	length of homelessness
Rocha et al., 1996	number of children (–) White (+) year of shelter stay (–)	
Shinn et al., 1990		nonprofit shelter (–) domestic violence shelter (–) pregnant household member (–) age of youngest child (+) family size (+)

Rocha et al. (1996) were interested in determining what factors contributed to families being able to move out of shelters and into permanent housing, as opposed to temporary housing. Data from 1983 through 1992 from two shelters in St. Louis, Missouri provided them with a sample of 1,156 families that exited a shelter to either permanent or temporary housing arrangements. (Families that had not moved or that had moved to unknown locations were excluded from the sample.) Three of the six variables they included in their logistic regression analysis were statistically significant. The number of children in a family was negatively associated with the family's odds of moving into permanent, as opposed to temporary, housing. White families' odds of moving into permanent housing were nearly twice the odds of African

American families. Finally, the odds of moving into permanent housing decreased precipitously over time. The age of the household head, the educational level of the household head, and the household income were not significantly related to families' odds of moving into permanent housing.

Shinn et al. (1990) compared length of stay (and quality of exit[6]) among recent residents of welfare hotels, city-operated congregate shelters, and four types of nonprofit family shelters (apartment shelters, alternative hotels, rooming house shelters, and shelters for domestic violence victims) in New York City. Interviews with the directors of nine nonprofit shelters provided information on the duration of stay and destination of the last 20 families to leave each shelter. Data on the welfare hotels and congregate shelters were not collected directly but rather were gathered from public data files. Regarding length of stay, the authors reported differences among the types of nonprofit shelters, as well as between the nonprofit and welfare shelters. They believed that these differences were due to two primary factors. First, the level of housing advocacy provided to residents was greater in nonprofit shelters than in welfare shelters. Second, regulations regarding length of stay and priority of placement varied among the shelters. For example, domestic violence shelters had a relatively short time limit for how long families could remain. Additionally, pregnant women and women with newborn babies were given priority for permanent housing. Finally, the authors believed that larger families were harder to place in housing, which contributed to longer average stays in shelters accommodating, on average, larger families.

[6] Quality of exit results are not discussed.

Description of Event History Analysis Models

Event history analysis techniques hold several advantages over other approaches to analyzing families' exits from homelessness (Allison, 1984, 1995). Logistic regression analyses of families' odds of exiting homelessness, such as that presented in Rocha et al. (1996), do not take into account the timing of families' exits. Therefore, when a longitudinal record of events is available, logistic regression wastes information. To fix this problem, one might suggest using OLS regression to model the length of homelessness until exit, as in Shinn et al. (1990). This approach would work fine if all families exited during the period of data collection. Notice that Shinn and her colleagues avoided this problem by defining their sample retrospectively rather than following a certain group of homeless families throughout their homelessness, an approach that might result in an undersampling of families that are prone to long-term homelessness. In studies where families are sampled at or near the start of their homeless spell, issues of right censoring are typically present. In other words, it is likely that some families will still be homeless when data collection ends, and it is possible that other families will have dropped out of the sample for various reasons. Censoring of the latter type can be problematic, an issue that will be discussed in Chapter 4, but only event history analysis techniques allow for the possibility of dealing with censoring properly. A third advantage of event history analysis over other approaches is that it allows for the use of independent variables that change over time. Any variables, such as income or employment status, without time-invariant values can be incorporated as time-varying variables.

So, what is event history analysis? Event history analysis is not a single technique; rather, it is a collection of statistical techniques that can be used to analyze event history data. Such data sets consist of longitudinal records of the timing of events as they happen to individuals (or

families, or any other unit of observation). Events are typically qualitative changes that create sharp contrasts between time periods by occurring at specific points in time, rather than happening gradually over time (Allison, 1984, 1995). In other words, an event marks the transition from one state (homelessness) to another state (housed). A major advantage of event history analysis is that it can measure events that occur at any point in time, rather than just at predetermined points in time (Blossfeld & Rohwer, 2002). The event being considered in this dissertation is families' exits from homelessness, so the various aspects of event history methods are discussed in that context.

Several decisions must be made when developing a model for event history data. The researcher must decide whether to model single or repeated events and whether to consider one kind or multiple kinds of events. The appropriate origin of the time scale also must be decided upon. Finally, the researcher must decide which of the statistical methods to use and how to deal with any possibly troublesome censoring (Allison, 1984, 1995). The first three issues are discussed below, both in general terms and in the context of the research described in this dissertation. The final two issues are discussed in great detail in Chapter 4.

Single or repeated events.

Event history techniques can be used to model events that occur once or events that occur multiple times. Furthermore, single-event models are not limited to events (such as death) that can only be experienced by a given person once. When repeatable events are modeled with single-event techniques, only one occurrence of the event is recorded for each person. This approach is often preferable because multiple-event models are fairly complex (Allison, 1984, 1995). Therefore, although some families have had one or more separate homeless spells in the

past or may exit and then reenter homelessness in the future, such multiple episodes of homelessness are not modeled in the research described in this dissertation.

One or multiple kinds of events.

Event history analysis techniques also allow for the possibility of modeling different types of events. A relevant example is provided in the research of Wong et al. (1997), which is reviewed later in this chapter. Distinctions are not made among different kinds of exits in the research described in this dissertation. Therefore, the analysis focuses on an event with only one type—an exit from homelessness into permanent housing.

The origin of time.

The origin of time refers to the time when the members of a sample will start being at risk of the event under consideration. Importantly, this time does not have to be the same for all sample members. Decisions about the origin of time might seem simple, but, if such decisions are made poorly, results can be biased (Allison, 1995). The research for this dissertation presents a perfect example of a less-than-obvious decision about the origin of time. At first glance, one might suggest the day on which a family's current homeless episode commenced as the day on which they started being at risk of an exit from homelessness. If data collection for the families started simultaneously with their homeless episodes, this approach would be ideal. However, because the data came from the case files of a non-residential support agency (A Child's Place), data collection started on the day a family first began working with the agency, which was not necessarily the day the family became homeless. For the majority of families in the sample, data collection commenced at some date *after* their current homeless episode began. These families were not at risk of an observable exit in the time that they were homeless before they became clients at A Child's Place. Therefore, the appropriate origin of time for such families is the date

on which they began working with A Child's Place. For a few families, data collection commenced *before* their homeless episode began. In those cases, the appropriate origin of time is the date on which they became homeless. In sum, the origin of time for a family is the latter of the start date for their homeless episode and the date on which they enrolled with A Child's Place.

Models of Exit Hazard Rates

Some of the primary event history analyses of exits from homelessness (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Dworsky & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Wright, Mare, & Westerfelt, 1996; Sosin, Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990) have explored transitions of homeless *individuals* or have grouped families and individuals together. Based on the evidence reviewed earlier that family homelessness is distinct from individual homelessness, their results are not reviewed. Two studies have used event history analysis techniques to model exit hazard rates among homeless families. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) used Cox's proportional hazards model to estimate exit hazard rates for three groups—single men, single women, and unmarried women with children. Wong et al. (1997) used Cox's proportional hazards model to estimate a competing-risk hazard rate regression model of exit hazard rates for homeless families, where four specific types of exits were considered. Significant results from their research are shown in Table 2.4 and are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) compared homeless-housed transitions among single men, single women, and women with children in Alameda County, California. In April 1991, homeless adults were randomly sampled from shelter residents and clients of agencies providing meals. In all, 522 homeless adults in the three categories (single men, single women, and women with children) were sampled and interviewed about previous and current homeless spells, mental

Table 2.4

Results on the Hazard of Exiting Homelessness, Among Families

Study	Variables significantly related to the exit hazard rate
Wong & Piliavin, 1997a, 1997b	household head has alcohol abuse problem (–)
	amount of cash benefits (+)
Wong et al., 1997	age of household head (–)[a b c d]
	African American (–)[a b c d]
	Hispanic (–)[b c d]
Wong et al., 1997 *(cont.)*	number of adults (–)[a c d]
	number of children (–)[d]
	pregnant household member (+)[d]
	received public assistance (+)[a], (–)[d]
	homeless because of domestic violence (+)[a b c]
	homeless because of environmental reasons (+)[a b], (–)[d]
	initially homeless in winter (+)[a]
	initially homeless in spring (+)[a c]
	year of initial homelessness (–)[d]

[a] Significant in relation to exits to subsidized housing.

[b] Significant in relation to exits to own housing.

[c] Significant in relation to exits to other arrangements.

[d] Significant in relation to exits to unknown conditions.

and physical health statuses, alcohol and drug use, social and medical service use, and demographic characteristics.[7] The researchers located 443 of the initial sample members for a second round of interviews regarding homeless-domicile transitions. Each follow-up interview took place any time from three months to two years after the initial interview. Two separate

[7] An additional 42 adults who represented men with children, two-parent families, and couples without children also were interviewed but those data were excluded from the analysis.

multivariate analyses of exits were conducted: pooled-sample and within-subsample. Some of the results comparing women with children to single women were considered earlier in this chapter. Only results from the within-subsample analysis of homeless women with children are considered here. These results are based on the 66 women with children who were interviewed in both rounds.

Almost all of the women with children exited their initial spell of homelessness, but only two variables were significant in explaining exit rates.[8] The presence of an alcohol problem was negatively associated with exit hazard rates, and the amount of cash benefits received from AFDC, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Disability Insurance, Social Security, Unemployment Compensation, and Veterans Benefits was positively related to exit hazard rates. The authors expressed several concerns related to the generalizability of their research. First, results probably cannot be generalized to families that do not use shelters or meal agencies. Second, results cannot be generalized to homeless families in other cities. Finally, there is a strong possibility that homeless families that were not re-interviewed differed significantly from those in the follow-up study.

Wong et al. (1997) conducted a study of exits from public family shelters in New York City. Data on 27,903 families in the New York City family shelter system were obtained from the organization's database, the Homeless Emergency Referral System (HOMES). This sample included all families who obtained shelter upon their first contact with the New York City Family Shelter System anytime between January 1, 1988 and October 1, 1993. Of the sampled

[8] Variables that were not significant included: the natural log of the length of the homeless spell at first interview, whether or not the family was previously homeless, the age of the mother, race, whether or not the mother had been in foster care, the mother's educational level, the mother's employment status, the mother's health status, whether or not the mother had a mental disability, whether or not the mother had a drug problem, the natural log of the family's cash wages, whether or not the family received social services, and whether or not the family received informal financial support from friends and relatives.

families, 24,627 officially exited (left for at least 30 days) the New York City Family Shelter System at some point before October 1, 1993. Exits were divided into four categories: exits to subsidized housing, exits to an apartment found by the family or to their previous residence (*i.e.*, own housing), exits to unknown arrangements, and other exits (involuntary exits, exits to shared lodging, and exits to shelters for domestic violence victims).

At the one-percent level, most variables were significant in predicting at least one type of exit.[9] Age of the household head was related significantly to all types of exits; families with older heads of household experienced lower hazard rates for all types of exits than did families with younger household heads. Overall, African American and Hispanic families had lower exit hazard rates than families of other races and ethnicities. Having more adults in a family also lowered the hazard rates of exit to three places (subsidized housing, other destinations, and unknown accommodations). Having more children in a family lowered the exit hazard rate to unknown arrangements, whereas having a pregnant family member raised the exit hazard rate to unknown arrangements. Families that received public assistance had higher exit hazard rates into subsidized housing and lower exit hazard rates into unknown arrangements than did other families. Among those who cited domestic violence as their reason for shelter admission, hazard rates for exits to subsidized housing, own housing, and other destinations were higher, compared to those who cited economic reasons. Among those who cited environment-related (as opposed to economic) reasons for homelessness, hazard rates for exits to subsidized housing and own housing were higher, whereas exit hazard rates to unknown destinations were lower. Admission during the winter or spring increased exit hazard rates to subsidized housing, and admission during the spring also increased exit hazard rates to other destinations. Finally, the year of shelter

[9] Only the variable indicating whether the family was headed by a single mother failed to reach significance with at least one type of exit.

entry was significant for all types of exits, with the most consistent pattern being that exit hazard rates to unknown accommodations fell over time.

The Need for More Research

Several variables exhibited significant relationships—with the length of a family's homeless spell or a family's odds or hazard of exiting homelessness—in more than one of the studies reviewed. Both being homeless due to domestic violence and having a pregnant household member seemed to increase the rate at which families exited homelessness (and, therefore, decrease the length of time that they were homeless). Similarly, the amount of cash benefits that a family received appeared to be positively associated with their rate of exit from homelessness, with the exception that it seemed negatively associated with a family's hazard of exit to unknown arrangements. Family size was found to be negatively associated with families' rates of leaving homelessness. African American families' chances of exiting homelessness were lower than the chances of White families. Finally, rates of exiting homelessness appeared to change over time. These results provide a good basis for future research, but they cannot be generalized outside of the locations where the studies took place (St. Louis, Missouri; New York City; and Alameda County, California). They also cannot be generalized to other groups of homeless families, such as those living doubled up with family or friends.

More research on homeless families' exits from homelessness is needed. In particular, two considerations should be taken in future research. First, researchers should attempt to find ways to expand their definition of homeless beyond those who are living in shelters. Despite the fact that there are reasons to believe that relatively few families live on the streets, many families live in motels, doubled up with friends or family, or in other homeless conditions. Second,

researchers should focus on families from cities other than those already studied, namely, cities in the South, which largely have been ignored.

Comparisons of Homeless Families Living in Different Environments

Most research related to homeless families has focused on families living in emergency shelters and possibly also other similar arrangements, such as transitional housing or welfare hotels. When families living in unconventional places, motels, or doubled-up arrangements have been included in research, they typically have been grouped together with families living in shelters. Such an approach ignores the possibility that groups of families living in various environments differ in significant ways.

An additional component to the research of Letiecq et al. (1998), which was described earlier, involved comparisons within the sample of 92 homeless families. Recall that all families were female-headed and included a preschool child enrolled in Head Start in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area. Each family lived in one of three homeless arrangements: emergency shelters (31 families), transitional housing (44 families), and doubled-up arrangements (17 families). Both similarities and differences were found among the three groups. The mean age of the women, which ranged from 25.5 to 27.5, was not significantly different across the groups. Educational level also did not differ, with the majority (84%-88%) of women in each group having no more than a high school diploma. The two main differences found were marital status and level of social support. Doubled-up women were significantly more likely to be married than were women living in emergency shelters or transitional housing. Women living in doubled-up arrangements also showed signs of having more social support than other homeless women. The authors encouraged future researchers to study homeless families living in diverse environments.

CHAPTER 3

A PORTRAIT OF HOMELESS FAMILIES AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA[10]

[10] Vanderford, S. E. and A. L. Sweaney. To be submitted to *Families in Society*.

Family homelessness is a significant and rapidly growing problem in many cities across the United States. In 2005, a survey of 24 mayors across the nation revealed that families with children accounted for approximately 33% of the American homeless population (Lowe, Slater, Welfley, & Beard, 2005). Furthermore, homeless families' requests for shelter in the 24 surveyed cities increased by an average of 5% from 2004 to 2005. More than 60% of the mayors reported an increase in family homelessness in their city for that time period, and 95% stated that they anticipate homelessness among families in their city to grow in 2006.

Complicating the picture, these statistics deal only with homeless families living in or seeking a place in homeless shelters. No one knows how many families never turn to a shelter for residence. Even among the more than 700 homeless families living in shelters across the nation and surveyed by Nunez and Fox (1999), 4% had lived previously on the street or in abandoned buildings. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many families choose to double up with other households rather than live in shelters. At any point in time, some homeless families are not receiving shelter or other supportive services and, therefore, go uncounted.

This research was based in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the homeless family population approaches one half of the city's total homeless population and appears to be growing faster than homeless family populations in other cities across the country. The city's mayor reported that 45% of people who stayed in the city's shelters in the year 2005 were members of homeless families with children. Between 2004 and 2005, Charlotte reported a 10% increase in requests for emergency shelter by families—twice the average rate of increase among 24 cities nationwide. Additionally, Charlotte was one of the cities surveyed in 2005 in which shelter administrators reported turning away families because of a lack of resources and splitting up other families in order to provide them with shelter (Lowe et al., 2005). In fact, in the summer of

2004, shelters in the Charlotte area were turning away families at a higher rate than they had in years (Smolowitz, 2004).

Despite the growing prevalence of family homelessness in Charlotte, thorough research on the subject has not been conducted. The goals of this research were to add to the descriptive literature on family homelessness and, consequently, to inform service providers' approaches to assisting homeless families in Charlotte, North Carolina. First, many characteristics of a sample of homeless families with school-age children are described. Second, the sample of homeless families is compared to a sample of families considered at risk of homelessness.

Definition of *Homeless*

Before studying homeless families, the meaning of *homeless* must be stated explicitly. Arriving at a complete yet measurable definition of homelessness is difficult. Are only those people actually living on the streets homeless? What about those people staying in shelters or other temporary housing? Should families living doubled up with others be considered homeless, near homeless, precariously housed, or something else altogether? In the face of these questions, researchers and practitioners must draw a line between people who are homeless and, therefore, can be included in research or are eligible for services, and people who are not homeless. Unfortunately, no single definition of homeless exists, which must be kept in mind when comparing conclusions from research.

A wide range of definitions of homelessness is represented in the past research that is reviewed in this article. For greater convenience in studying homeless families, researchers often have limited their operational definitions of homeless to families residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or welfare hotels (Bassuk, Weinreb, Buckner, Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1996; ICP, 2000; Johnson, McChesney, Rocha, & Butterfield, 1995). In another case, families

living doubled up with friends or family members also were included in research (Letiecq, Anderson, & Koblinsky, 1996, 1998). In some instances, more specific definitions of homeless have been used. The National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999) counted as homeless any families that lived—in the previous seven days—in unconventional accommodations (such as on the street or in a vehicle or abandoned building), a shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel paid for by a voucher. In addition, they included families that, in the past week, had not lived in a residence that they had maintained as their own for at least 30 days. Finally, homeless families included those that would not be able to stay in their current residence for the next month because they were facing eviction, foreclosure, or being kicked out of doubled-up arrangements.

The research described in this article utilized a definition of homelessness—the broad definition presented in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001—that is at least slightly different from all of the above definitions. This act provided a definition of homelessness pertaining to children and youth. Specific situations in which children and youth would be considered homeless include when they:

> are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement…[or] are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. (Sec. 725(2)(B))

The data source for this research was chosen specifically to allow for the inclusion of homeless families from a wide range of living arrangements. The sample of homeless families includes

families living in unconventional accommodations (such as vehicles, abandoned buildings, and public areas), emergency shelters, transitional housing, motels, and doubled-up arrangements. Families facing imminent foreclosure or eviction are considered at risk of homelessness.

Literature Review

Characteristics of Homeless Families

Cross-sectional studies with the goal of describing specific segments of the homeless family population have been conducted by many researchers across the nation. Most of this research has focused on small geographical areas, such as cities or counties, and is unlikely to be generalizable to other localities. This literature review considers the results of two studies—one national and one that focused on certain Southern states. The U.S. Bureau of the Census conducted the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) in October and November of 1996 to gain information on homeless assistance programs (HAPs) and the clients who use them (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). From HAPs across the country, 4,207 adult clients were interviewed, 2,938 of whom were currently homeless. About 15% of households included children under the age of 18. On a smaller scale, in 2000, the Institute for Children and Poverty (2000) surveyed 202 homeless families from 14 shelters in North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Key characteristics of these two samples are shown in Table 3.1.

These two samples of homeless families differed in some ways (educational level and employment status, for example), but were very similar in other ways. The majority of homeless adults were unmarried women, the most represented racial group was Blacks, and young children were heavily represented. In addition, one half or more of homeless families were homeless for the first time. Finally, families had very low incomes. Burt (2001) concluded that extreme

Table 3.1

Key Characteristics of Two Samples of Homeless Families

Characteristics	Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999	Institute for Children and Poverty, 2000
Children	average number = 2.2 42% under age 6	average number = 2 36% under age 5
Demographics	84% female 41% never married; 23% married; 23% separated; 13% divorced 43% Black; 38% White; 15% Hispanic	94% female 84% single 50% Black; 44% White average age = 32
Education, Employment, and Income	53% less than a high school diploma; 27% some education beyond high school 29% employed within the past month average monthly income = $475 80% received at least one means-tested benefit 72% received food stamps	77% high school diploma 42% employed average length of employment = 6 months 28% never received welfare; 16% received welfare for more than 2 years
Descriptions of Homelessness	50% in first homeless episode most common (48%) location was transitional housing	58% in first homeless episode average length of homeless spell = 11 months

poverty seemed to be the most important vulnerability for homelessness among families. Among families in the NSHAPC, the most common reason for homelessness was an inability to pay rent. Additionally, about one half of families reported food insecurity problems (Burt, 2001; The Urban Institute, 1999). Many of the adults in the Institute for Children and Poverty's (2000) sample reported characteristics that may be seen as risk factors for homelessness (14% were

previously in foster care, 8% were homeless when they were children, 65% reported domestic violence abuse, and 29% were seeking counseling for substance abuse), but the main impediment to stable and permanent housing seemed to be their limited incomes. On average, families needed to earn 20% more to be able to afford to meet their basic needs. The results of these studies paint detailed pictures of family homelessness overall across the nation and in one Southern region, but nothing can be said about any particular city based on these aggregated data.

Differences Between Homeless and Low-Income Housed Families

Homeless families also can be characterized by identifying significant differences between them and low-income housed families. Many such studies have been conducted; three are considered here. First, Johnson et al. (1995) compared 188 families from two St. Louis, Missouri shelters in 1989 with 2,000 St. Louis families with incomes below the federal poverty level. Second, Bassuk et al. (1996) compared 220 homeless families and 216 never-homeless families that were receiving AFDC and were interviewed between August 1992 and July 1995. All families lived in Worcester, Massachusetts, were female-headed (married or unmarried), and included at least one child under the age of 17. Finally, Letiecq et al. (1996, 1998) compared homeless and low-income housed families, all of which were female-headed and included at least one child of preschool age (3-5 years) enrolled in a Head Start program in the Baltimore/Washington, DC area. The sample comprised 92 homeless families and 115 low-income housed families.

Johnson et al. (1995) identified significant differences between homeless and low-income housed families on most of the variables they considered. Homeless families were more likely to be headed by Black persons and single mothers than were low-income housed families.

Homeless parents were more likely than low-income housed parents to be single or separated. Homeless families averaged fewer adults per household than did low-income housed families. Homeless women were, on average, younger than low-income housed women. Finally, homeless families had, on average, lower annual incomes but higher annual AFDC payments than low-income housed families. There was no significant difference between the two groups in educational level or number of children in the household.

Bassuk et al. (1996) also found many differences between the two groups of families. Homeless mothers were more likely than low-income housed mothers to be Black and less likely to be White. About 42% of both homeless and housed mothers were Hispanic. On average, homeless mothers and their children were younger than their housed counterparts, and homeless mothers were more likely to be pregnant. Compared to low-income housed mothers, homeless mothers had lower average incomes and were less likely to receive AFDC, food stamps, or child support. Homeless mothers were more likely than housed mothers to have not graduated from high school. Homeless families had moved, on average, twice as many times in the past two years as low-income housed families. Significant differences between the homeless and housed samples were not found in relation to marital status, number of children, or employment status.

Letiecq et al. (1996, 1998) found no differences between homeless and low-income housed mothers in terms of race, age, number of children, or employment status, but other comparisons revealed significant differences. Homeless mothers were less likely than low-income housed mothers to be married or cohabiting and also had, on average, fewer adults living with them. The average educational level among homeless mothers was lower than that among low-income housed mothers. On average, homeless mothers had lived in their current residences for only about 14% as long as low-income housed mothers had. Significant differences related to

social support also were found. In a typical week, the average homeless mother saw or talked to fewer relatives or friends than her average low-income housed counterpart. Homeless mothers reported fewer people they could count on for help, including fewer people who could watch their children. In the past six months, homeless mothers had received less assistance than had low-income housed mothers from their overall social support networks.

The results of these three comparisons of homeless and low-income housed families lend support for several differences and a couple of similarities between the two types of families. Homeless parents seem to be more likely than low-income housed parents to be Black, to be single or separated, and to have had frequent moves. In addition, homeless parents appear, on average, to be younger and less educated and to have lower incomes than their housed counterparts. There is not support for any difference in the number of children or the employment status of the household heads. Finally, although not previously discussed, Burt (2001) compared the food security of the homeless families in the NSHAPC to that of all poor U.S. households in 1995 and found that homeless families were much more likely to experience hunger and food insecurity.

Summary

Although some characteristics of homeless families, such as primarily being headed by women, are common across samples, other characteristics tend to vary—sometimes to a large extent—when families are sampled from very different geographic areas. Further descriptive and comparative research related to homeless families is needed, especially in cities where such research has not been conducted. Homeless service providers cannot rely on data from other locations as accurate portraits of the homeless populations they are serving. Charlotte, NC is one such city where a thorough descriptive study of homeless families has not been conducted.

Understanding the characteristics of homeless families is necessary before it will be possible to design the most effective policies to assist them.

Data and Sample

Based on a desire to include homeless families living in many different living arrangements, families were sampled from the case files of A Child's Place, which is an organization that provides supportive services to homeless families and families at risk of homelessness. Because A Child's Place is not a residential program, it is able to work with homeless families living in any homeless situation, such as shelters, transitional housing, motels, unconventional accommodations, and doubled-up arrangements. In addition, families may remain clients as long as they are homeless or struggling to maintain stable housing, regardless of whether they move. While clients at A Child's Place, families can receive many types of assistance, such as donations of school supplies or clothing, help completing applications for food stamps or other benefits, and assistance locating affordable housing.

Although using data from A Child's Place allowed for a broad definition of what constitutes homelessness, the tradeoff is the limit on the types of families that could possibly be in the sample. A Child's Place was created to provide support for homeless families and at-risk families with school-age (Pre-K through 12^{th} grade) children enrolled in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) public school system, with an emphasis on identifying homeless and at-risk students in the Pre-K and elementary levels. The exact population served and the means of providing services have changed since its founding in 1989 (Yon & Mickelson, 2002). Since 1997, A Child's Place has operated by receiving client referrals from other agencies and from teachers and social workers in CMS schools. Once referred, families can choose whether or not they wish to work with A Child's Place.

The sample for this research comprises the majority of families (both homeless and at-risk) that became clients of A Child's Place between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005.[11] All families from that time period with available paper case files at the time of data collection were included in the sample; it is possible that a very small number of families' files were lost or destroyed before data collection commenced. Case files were available for a total of 245 homeless families and 109 families at risk of homelessness. Families were considered homeless if they were homeless at any time during their most recent client episode at A Child's Place, even if they were considered at risk of homelessness when their case opened. Seventeen families were initially at risk and later became homeless.

The data collection process was exhaustive; no piece of recorded information on the families was ignored, which meant that both paper and electronic files were used whenever possible. The primary source of data was one or more paper intake forms that are completed when a family begins working with A Child's Place. Examples of these forms are available elsewhere (Vanderford, 2006). That information was supplemented with information from any other papers in a family's file, when available, which included copies of applications for monetary assistance from other agencies, requests for school supplies, and case notes from meetings between the family and the social worker, among other things. When available, electronic files were used to crosscheck information from families' paper files.

Results

Data analysis focused on painting a detailed picture of the sample of homeless families. The data offered a wide array of variables that could be used to describe the homeless families. We have divided these into the categories of 1) demographic characteristics, 2) education,

[11] Families that were clients on two or more separate occasions during that time period were only included in the data for their last client episode.

employment, and income characteristics, 3) living situations, and 4) needs, problems, and possible reasons for homelessness. In addition, comparisons are drawn between the at-risk families and the homeless families.

Describing the Homeless Families

A few clarifying points are necessary upfront. First, many families were missing information on one or more variables, so the sample size used to calculate the descriptive statistics is not the same across all variables. Applicable sample sizes are noted for statistics based on samples smaller than the full sample of 245 homeless families. Second, in two-adult families, the family head[12] was designated as the adult who served as the family's primary contact person with A Child's Place. For most families, more information (such as educational level and work history) was available for the family head than for his or her spouse or partner. Finally, a large number of homeless families lived doubled up with other families. In these instances, the characteristics described are only those of the homeless family, not the family with which they were living.

Demographic characteristics.

Demographic characteristics of the homeless families are summarized in Table 3.2. Based on this information, the typical homeless parent was a 34-year-old Black female who did not have a spouse or partner. Additionally, Hispanic homeless families were more common than non-Hispanic White homeless families. Nearly 12% of family heads reported being immigrants, mostly of Hispanic ethnicity, but some from African countries. Other information about the homeless families indicates that a small percentage (2.5%) of family heads were grandmothers

[12] We have opted against the more common *household head* because its meaning is ambiguous for doubled-up families.

(none were grandfathers) acting as primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Finally, just under 9% of adult females in homeless families were pregnant.

Table 3.2

Demographic Characteristics of Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Percent or Mean (St. dev.)
Family type	
Single female	80.8%
Single male	3.7%
Married couple	9.4%
Cohabiting couple	6.1%
Family head is grandparent	2.5%
Age of family head[a]	33.8 (8.1)
Race/ethnicity of family head and spouse/partner	
Black	76.7%
Hispanic	12.2%
White	7.4%
Mixed/Other	3.7%
Family head is an immigrant	11.8%
Family head or spouse/partner is pregnant	8.6%
Number of children	2.4 (1.3)
Age of children[b]	8.4 (4.4)
Gender of children[c]	
Female	45.5%
Male	54.5%

[a] Adult age statistics are based on a sample of 242 families.

[b] Child age statistics are based on a sample of 588 children.

[c] Child gender statistics are based on a sample of 591 children.

Information about family type, broken down by race and ethnicity, is not shown in the table but is still worth mention. Among Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites, homeless parents were more likely to be single females than single males or couples. However, Black homeless parents were the most likely to be single females; nearly 90% of Black families were headed by single females, compared to 63% of Hispanic families, half of White families, and 33% of other families.

Continuing with Table 3.2, we find information about the children in homeless families. The 245 families included a total of 592 children. The typical homeless family included two or three children, ranging in age from eight weeks to 21 years, and with an average age of just over eight years.[13] Male children were slightly overrepresented in the sample, as they accounted for 54.5% of all the homeless children. In addition, 53 families also reported having other children who were not living with them at the time. These included adult children living on their own and minor children living with other relatives or placed in foster care.

Education, employment, and income characteristics.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the educational attainment of the heads of the homeless families, based on information from all but five of the families. The most common level of education was that of having attended some college, earned a two-year college degree, or completed vocational training. However, nearly as many family heads had not earned a high school diploma. Although not shown in the figure, 9% of family heads indicated that they were currently enrolled in some kind of educational coursework, such as English classes, GED classes, or job training.

[13] The six children aged 18 and older in the sample were included because they were still living with their parent(s) and considered part of the main family unit, as opposed to an adult child doubling up with his or her parents. In several cases, these children were still in high school or working on their GEDs.

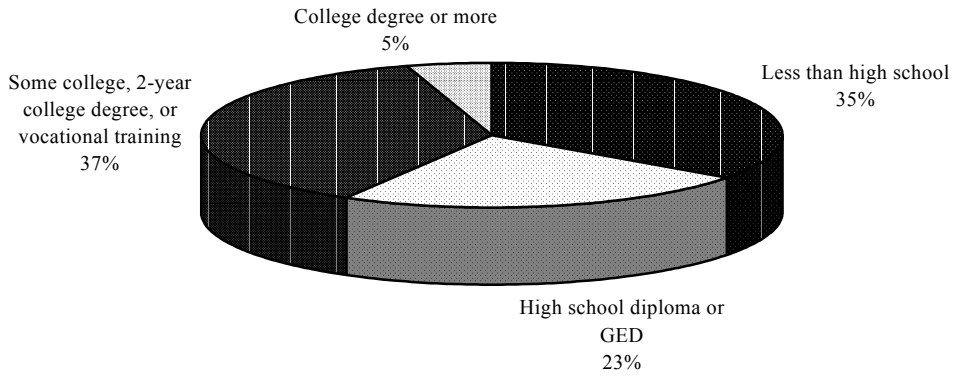

Figure 3.1. Educational levels of homeless family heads from A Child's Place.

Employment information is shown in Figure 3.2. The most common category was a one-adult family in which the adult was not working. Employment was fairly uncommon among both single adults and couples, but couples were more likely to include at least one working adult, probably due at least in part to the availability of the other parent to provide childcare. Among one-adult families, only 27% of adults were employed. Among couples, however, 55% included at least one working adult. In thinking about homeless parents' employment situations, two things must be kept in mind. First, these figures only represent employment that the families reported to their caseworkers. Case files in which information about employment was left blank could indicate a lack of employment, the caseworkers' failure to ask about employment, or the families' unwillingness to share employment information. Therefore, these numbers should be seen as lower bounds regarding employment among homeless parents. Second, employment did

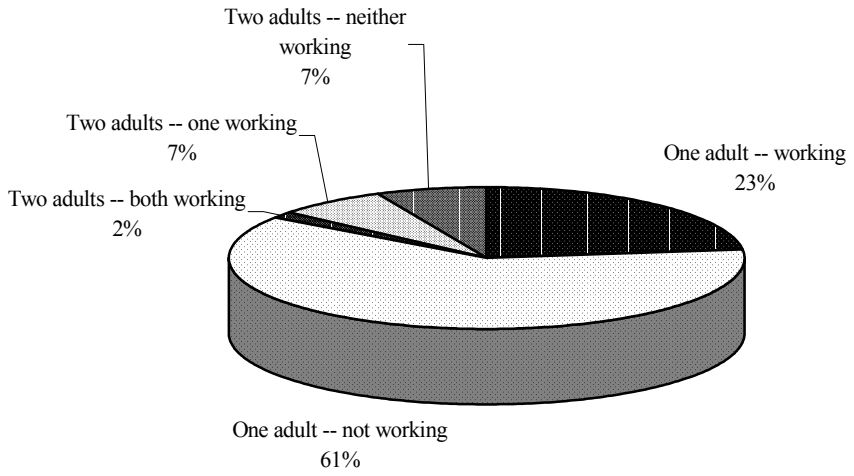

Figure 3.2. Employment statuses of homeless parents from A Child's Place.

not always indicate stable employment. Some of the jobs held by the homeless parents were seasonal, temporary, or off-the-books and did not represent what would commonly be considered stable, long-term employment.

Homeless parents' employment statuses should also be considered in light of their work histories. The families' employment situations look a little better when the parents' full-time work histories are examined; 65% of single adults had full-time work experience, and 71% of couples included at least one adult with full-time work experience. However, 34% of all the homeless families included no adult with full-time work experience. Furthermore, many adults had been out of work for months or even years. Family heads who were not working were asked to state the date on which their most recent job ended. For the 138 nonworking parents who gave such a date, the mean number of days since the family head was last employed was 421, or about 14 months.

Finally, Table 3.3 summarizes monthly wage information for the homeless families. Regarding the percentage of families receiving each income source, the same caution must be taken as with employment in the sense that these figures must be interpreted as lower bounds. The mean and standard deviation for each source of income was calculated based only on those families that reported receiving the income type. Only one income type—food stamps—was

Table 3.3

Sources of Monthly Income for Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Income source	Percent receiving	Mean (dollars)	Standard deviation
Wages	31.8%	1070.3	528.1
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	22.5%	252.9	88.2
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	13.5%	550.4	283.6
Social Security	6.9%	489.4	234.8
Child support	20.0%	296.0	174.8
Food stamps	56.3%	332.9	151.7
Other[a]	10.6%	545.7	484.3

[a] Includes Veterans Benefits, Unemployment Compensation, severance pay, retirement income, and informal support from family and friends.

reported by over half (56.3%) of the homeless families. An additional 13% of families had applied for, but were not yet receiving, food stamps. Despite the fact that over 80% of families were headed by single women, only slightly more than 20% reported receiving each of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child support. Among families not receiving TANF, 19% had applied for funds and another 29% indicated that they were ineligible because they had been sanctioned, had used their time limit, made too much money, or were an

immigrant. The remaining families did not state why they were not receiving TANF. Only 4% of families not receiving child support had applied for it.

Living situations.

Figure 3.3 shows where the homeless families were living when they became clients at A Child's Place. (Families that were initially at risk of homelessness and later became homeless are classified according to where they lived when their homeless episode started.) The category for emergency shelter includes all types of emergency shelters—family shelters, battered women's shelters, and substance abuse treatment shelters. The small category of other homeless situations comprises families living on the street, in abandoned buildings, or in cars, as well as families that were completely unstable from night to night and families that were split up due to their homelessness, with some family members living in a shelter and others living doubled up. The two most common living situations—emergency shelters and doubled-up arrangements with friends or family—each account for over 40% of homeless families.

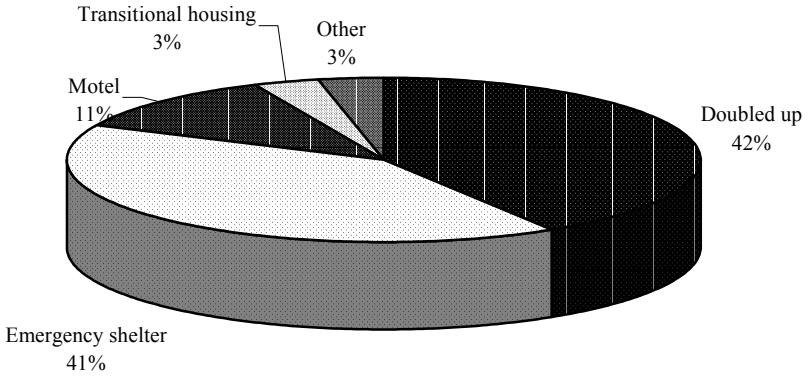

Figure 3.3. Initial living situations for homeless families from A Child's Place.

Families were also asked to provide information about their immediately previous living situation, which is summarized in Figure 3.4. (Families whose homeless episodes started after they became clients are classified based on where they were living when they became clients.) Fifty-five percent of the homeless families were living in housing that they owned or rented immediately before their current homeless living arrangements. The small percentage of families whose immediately previous living arrangements were other non-homeless arrangements had just moved either from another country or out of their parents' house, where they had lived as a minor. The remaining families had lived in different homeless arrangements immediately prior to their current homeless living conditions. One-quarter of families had been doubled up, and another 9% had lived in another homeless situation, such as an emergency shelter, motel, or transitional housing. Nine percent of families did not state where they lived previously.

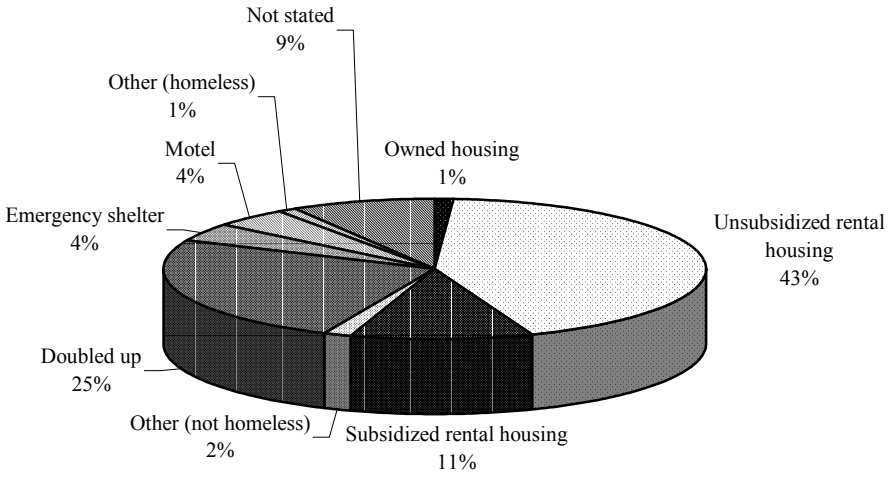

Figure 3.4. Previous living situations for homeless families from A Child's Place.

Table 3.4 reports information about the homeless families' living situations throughout their current homeless spell, as well as information about whether they moved between homeless living arrangements and/or moved into permanent housing. The homeless spell included time before and after becoming a client at A Child's Place in which a family was continuously homeless. Nearly 70% of homeless families lived doubled up at some point during their current homeless spell, as opposed to only 50% that lived in a shelter at some point. Furthermore, 30% of the homeless families only lived doubled up during their homeless spell, whereas 5% only lived in a shelter. The transitory nature of homelessness among the families is represented by the fact that nearly 67% of the families moved from one homeless arrangement to another during their current homeless spell. Furthermore, this is almost definitely an underestimate of the

Table 3.4

Living Situations of Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Percent
At some point during homeless spell, lived…	
doubled up	69.8%
in a motel	26.9%
in a shelter	46.9%
in transitional housing	12.7%
in another situation	11.4%
in unknown arrangements	17.1%
During homeless spell, only lived…	
doubled up	30.2%
in a shelter	5.3%
Moved into permanent housing	40.4%
Moved, but remained homeless	66.9%

percentage of families that moved because it does not account for families that had no recorded move but that had their case closed because their caseworker was no longer able to make contact with them. Finally, 40% of the homeless families moved into permanent housing while they were clients at A Child's Place. The other families had their cases closed for any number of reasons—transferal to another service provider, budget cuts at A Child's Place, inability of the caseworker to locate the family, unwillingness of the family to continue working with A Child's Place, or relocation outside of Mecklenburg County—before they found permanent housing.

Among the families that moved into permanent housing, the vast majority moved into unsubsidized rental housing, as shown in Figure 3.5. The category of other subsidized housing includes public housing and privately subsidized housing. The mean length of time that these families were homeless before they moved into permanent housing was 254 days. This mean compares to a mean length of homelessness of 299 days among families that did not move into

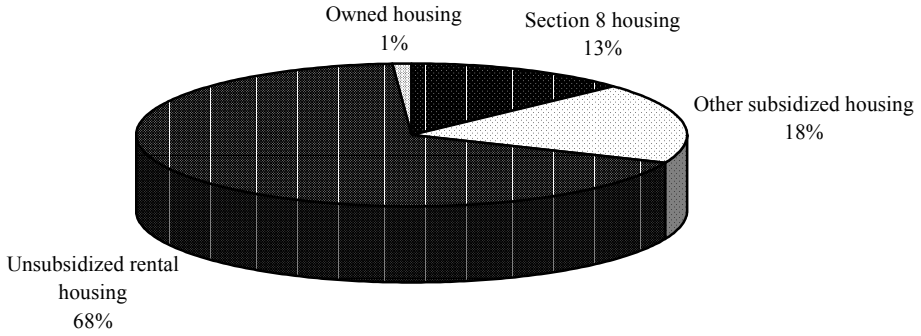

Figure 3.5. Living situations of homeless families from A Child's Place that moved into permanent housing.

permanent housing.[14] Lengths of homeless spells for families that did not report moving into permanent housing are biased downward. Because their cases were closed while they were still homeless, it is impossible to know how long their homeless episodes truly lasted.

Needs, problems, and possible reasons for homelessness.

To varying degrees, homeless families' case files included information about needs they had, problems they were experiencing (or had experienced in the past), and explanations for why they were homeless. Information related to these topics is summarized in Tables 3.5 and 3.6. In clients' files, questions about these topics were not open ended but rather listed responses from which clients could choose. Depending on the types of intake forms used by the caseworkers and the extent to which those forms were completed, families had the chance to indicate some or all of the needs, problems, and reasons for homelessness listed in these tables. Therefore, the percentages reported should be viewed as lower bounds on the true percentages of such families in the sample.

Needs that the homeless families could report are shown in Table 3.5 in order of descending frequency. The need for shelter is, not surprisingly, at the top of the list, but it is perhaps surprising that not all families reported this need. Given the low numbers of employment in the sample, the high percentage of families that reported a need for employment is also expected. The needs for money and the skills to manage money were the next most frequently stated and the only other needs indicated by roughly half of the families or more. Moving down the list, we see that one out of every three families reported a need for furniture. Although this might be an unusual request for families living in shelters, doubled-up families would have a

[14] These means were calculated only for the families with an approximate start date for their homelessness. For some families, it was impossible to estimate when their homeless episodes started, due to incomplete housing histories. Among the families that moved into permanent housing, seven had unknown start dates for their homeless spells. Among the other families, 28 had unknown start dates for their current homeless episodes.

place for furniture, as would families that anticipated moving into their own housing soon. The expression of a need for help with utilities referred to needing help paying past due bills or, less often, needing help paying utility deposits on apartments where they hoped to move.

Table 3.5

Needs Reported by Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Family reported needing…	Percent of families that indicated the need
shelter	85.7%
employment	80.4%
money	65.3%
help with budgeting	49.8%
clothing	43.3%
medical care or medicine	35.9%
transportation	35.5%
furniture	33.9%
help with utilities	29.4%
food	27.4%
education	24.9%
mental health services	22.9%
dental care	21.6%
childcare	20.0%
help getting their children in school	17.6%
legal assistance	4.5%

Table 3.6 lists problems reported by homeless families. In most cases, these problems could be seen as possible causes for homelessness. However, many families had been dealing with these problems for long periods of time, and they only precipitated homelessness when

Table 3.6

Problems and Possible Reasons for Homelessness Among Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Family reported…	Percent of families that indicated the problem
a recent move to Charlotte	38.4%
current or former alcohol or drug abuse	26.9%
child behavior problems	22.9%
a recent family breakup	22.5%
a recent eviction	20.8%
current or former domestic violence	19.6%
being undocumented or lacking identification	6.5%
having a physical disability	4.5%
a fire or other disaster	3.3%

combined with other circumstances, such as the loss of a job. Given the myriad of needs and problems reported by many homeless families, very rarely did a family indicate a single reason for their homelessness. In the majority of cases, the need for money or employment was given as the primary explanation for homelessness and other needs and problems were listed as additional reasons.

Comparing the Homeless Families to the At-Risk Families

A second level of analysis consisted of comparing the homeless families to the families that were at risk of becoming homeless. The two groups were compared on key variables using *t* tests for the means of continuous variables and *chi square* tests for the frequency distributions of discrete variables. Before the results are presented, a few comments should be made about the sample of families considered at risk of homelessness. First, these families were defined as being at risk of homelessness because they were facing imminent eviction or foreclosure. Second,

although these families were not homeless when they were working with A Child's Place, some of them had been homeless in the past. Twenty-three at-risk families reported past homeless episodes. These families were not excluded from the comparative analysis because 47 at-risk families had incomplete housing histories, which made it impossible to tell if they had ever been homeless. Therefore, the comparisons that are made are those between currently homeless and currently at-risk families, as opposed to homeless families and families that have never been homeless. Finally, it should be helpful to know where the families at risk of becoming homeless were living, which is shown in Figure 3.6. The vast majority of families considered at risk of becoming homeless were living in unsubsidized rental housing. As already stated, 17 families were at risk of becoming homeless when they began working with A Child's Place but then became homeless; these families are included in the group of homeless families. Of the 109 at-risk families for which there was no reported change to homelessness, only 20 (18%) had their cases closed at A Child's Place with no indication of whether they had become more stable in

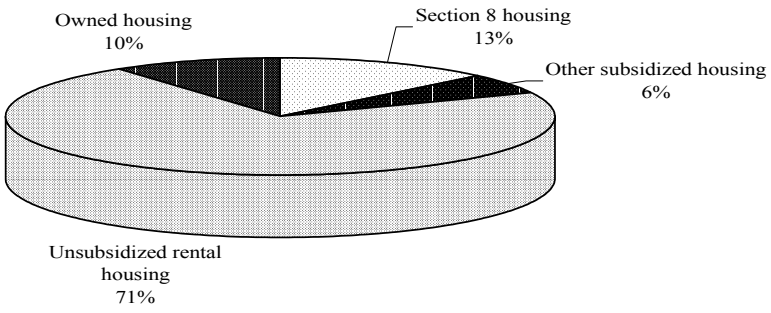

Figure 3.6. Living situations of at-risk families from A Child's Place.

their housing; the remaining 89 (82%) were no longer at risk of homelessness when their cases were closed.

Table 3.7

Demographic Characteristics of Homeless Families and At-Risk Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Homeless	At-risk	Test statistic
Family type***			22.64
Single female	80.8	63.3	
Single male	3.7	0	
Married couple	9.4	23.9	
Cohabiting couple	6.1	12.8	
Family head is grandparent	2.5	2.8	0.03
Age of family head	33.8	34.3	0.47
Race/ethnicity of family head and spouse/partner***			22.83
Black	76.7	61.5	
Hispanic	12.2	33.0	
White	7.4	4.6	
Mixed/Other	3.7	0.9	
Family head is an immigrant***	11.8	28.4	14.77
Family head or spouse/partner is pregnant	8.6	7.3	0.15
Number of children**	2.4	2.9	3.31
Age of children	8.4	8.9	1.31
Gender of children			0.97
Female	45.5	48.9	
Male	54.5	51.1	

Note. Values are means for continuous variables and frequencies for categorical variables. Test statistics are from *t* tests for continuous variables and from *chi square* tests for categorical variables.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Demographic characteristics of the homeless and at-risk families are compared in Table 3.7. The distributions of both family type and race or ethnicity differed between the two groups of families. Homeless family heads appeared more likely to be single females and Black, whereas at-risk family heads appeared more likely to be couples and Hispanic. Families at risk of homelessness were also more than twice as likely as homeless families to be immigrants, which is not surprising, given the much higher percentage of Hispanic families among the at-risk group. Finally, the mean number of children was slightly higher among families at risk of homelessness than among homeless families. The two groups did not differ in terms of the frequency of grandparents taking care of grandchildren, the age of the family head, the presence of a pregnant adult in the family, the age of children in the family, or the ratio of male to female children.

As shown in Table 3.8, homeless and at-risk families had much in common in terms of their education and income, but important differences existed in terms of employment. Neither the distribution of educational level nor the percentage of parents enrolled in educational courses differed between homeless and at-risk parents. Similar percentages of families from the two groups reported receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security, child support, and food stamps. However, employment distributions and, consequently, receipt of wages and TANF differed between homeless and at-risk families. At-risk families reported more employment, even when controlling for the number of adults in the family. Among one-adult at-risk families, 48% were employed; among couples, 84% included at least one working adult. Given the differences in employment, it is not surprising that families at risk of homelessness were nearly twice as likely as homeless families to report receiving income. Additionally, while 23% of homeless families reported receiving TANF, only 8% of families at risk of homelessness received TANF.

Table 3.8

Education and Income Characteristics of Homeless Families and At-Risk Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Homeless	At-risk	Test statistic
Educational level of family head			4.61
Less than high school diploma	34.3	31.2	
High school diploma or GED	22.9	31.2	
Some college[a]	36.3	28.4	
College degree or more	4.5	5.5	
Not stated	2.0	3.7	
Family head is enrolled in education	9.0	9.2	3.5E-3
Received wages***	31.8	61.5	27.39
Received TANF**	22.5	8.3	10.69
Received SSI	13.5	9.2	1.87
Received Social Security	6.9	2.8	2.59
Received child support	20.0	13.8	1.99
Received food stamps	56.3	53.2	0.68
Employment status***			35.08
One-adult families			
Adult not working	61.6	33.9	
Adult working	22.9	31.2	
Two-adult families			
Neither adult working	6.9	5.5	
One adult working	6.9	24.8	
Both adults working	1.6	4.6	

Note. Values are means for continuous variables and frequencies for categorical variables. Test statistics are from *t* tests for continuous variables and from *chi square* tests for categorical variables.

[a] Includes two-year college degrees and vocational training.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

The needs expressed by homeless and at-risk families were more similar than they were different, as shown in Table 3.9. Only five needs were expressed by significantly different percentages of the two groups of families. Not surprisingly, homeless parents more often expressed a need for shelter, and they also expressed needs for transportation and childcare more often than did parents at risk of homelessness. Families at risk of homelessness expressed needs for money and help with utilities more often than did homeless families.

Table 3.9

Needs of Homeless Families and At-Risk Families from A Child's Place

Family reported needing…	Homeless	At-risk	Test statistic
shelter***	85.7%	40.4%	76.54
employment	80.4%	73.4%	2.18
money***	65.3%	89.0%	21.27
help with budgeting	49.8%	56.0%	1.15
clothing	43.3%	35.8%	1.75
medical care or medicine	35.9%	42.2%	1.27
transportation***	35.5%	16.5%	13.05
furniture	33.9%	27.5%	1.40
help with utilities***	29.4%	61.5%	32.55
food	27.4%	34.9%	2.04
education	24.9%	16.5%	3.06
mental health services	22.9%	16.5%	1.84
dental care	21.6%	17.4%	0.82
childcare**	20.0%	8.3%	7.59
help getting their children in school	17.6%	11.9%	1.79
legal assistance	4.5%	6.4%	0.58

Note. Values are frequencies of families. Test statistics are from *chi square* tests.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Comparisons of the problems reported by families also produced some interesting results, as shown in Table 3.10. Homeless families were more than three times as likely as at-risk families to have reported a recent move to Charlotte. Problems with drug and alcohol abuse were divided into past problems and current problems for the comparison between the two groups of families. Approximately 6% of both homeless and at-risk parents reported that they had alcohol or drug problems in the past but were now sober. But homeless parents were nearly four times as likely as at-risk parents to report current drug or alcohol problems. Differences existed in the frequency of behavior problems among children in the two groups, with children in homeless families experiencing more behavior problems. Finally, at-risk families were more than twice as likely as homeless families to be undocumented or to lack identification. The two groups of

Table 3.10

Problems of Homeless Families and At-Risk Families from A Child's Place

Family reported …	Homeless	At-risk	Test statistic
a recent move to Charlotte***	38.4%	11.0%	26.9
former alcohol or drug abuse	6.1%	5.5%	0.05
current alcohol or drug abuse***	20.8%	5.5%	13.09
child behavior problems*	22.9%	12.8%	4.77
a recent family breakup	22.5%	14.7%	2.84
a recent eviction	20.8%	24.8%	0.69
current or former domestic violence	19.6%	20.2%	0.02
being undocumented or lacking identification*	6.5%	14.7%	6.09
having a physical disability	4.5%	5.5%	0.17

Note. Values are frequencies of families. Test statistics are from *chi square* tests.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

families did not differ in their experiences with recent family breakups, recent evictions, or domestic violence, nor did they differ in the percentage of families including a family member with a physical disability.

Discussion

Comparisons with Previous Research

Homeless families that were clients at A Child's Place in Charlotte, NC between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005 seem to have much in common with homeless families from other samples. Homeless parents are primarily single mothers, with an average age in their low- to mid-thirties. Homeless families have an average of two to three children. Employment among homeless parents is rare and, when obtained, is often short-term and unstable. As a result of employment patterns, incomes are low. Although alcohol and drug abuse are not dominant problems among homeless parents, approximately one-quarter report having such abuse problems.

In other important ways, however, homeless families from A Child's Place differed from homeless families described in past research. Black families were more heavily represented in the sample of families from Charlotte than in the NSHAPC or the Institute for Children and Poverty's Southern sample. Likewise, non-Hispanic White families were much less represented in Charlotte. Future research should explore possible reasons for the low percentage of White families represented among the clients of A Child's Place. Such explanations could relate to White families' social networks or their perceptions of a stigma associated with seeking help from agencies like A Child's Place. Or, the racial compositions of the schools that are most heavily targeted by A Child's Place might help explain the low percentage of White families among their clientele. Regarding education, the percentage of homeless parents from A Child's

Place with less than a high school diploma (35%) fell between the more extreme estimates from earlier research. Domestic violence was reported by only about 20% of homeless families at A Child's Place, a much lower percentage than found by the Institute for Children and Poverty. Receipt of food stamps, while the most common benefit among the Charlotte homeless families, was less prevalent than among the families in the NSHAPC. These differences highlight the importance of accurate local portraits of homeless family populations to motivate service providers' and political leaders' responses to family homelessness.

Additionally, the distribution of children's ages differed from those found in previous research. Not surprisingly, given the targeting of school-age children by A Child's Place, young children were less represented in this sample than in the NSHAPC or the Institute for Children and Poverty's sample. However, such children were not entirely absent among families from A Child's Place; 15% of homeless children were under the age of four, and an additional 8% were four years old. Although young homeless children may be underrepresented among families from A Child's Place, older homeless children may be represented more accurately than in samples that focus on homeless shelters. In particular, older homeless boys are often excluded from family homeless shelters. Nearly 17% of the homeless children from A Child's Place were age 13 or older.

One final way in which the families from A Child's Place differed from families included in previous research is the wide range of living accommodations represented, including a large percentage of families that were doubled up during their homeless spell. The detailed information about where families were living and where they moved while they were homeless allows for the possibility of exploring differences among subgroups of the sample. For example, 87% of all Hispanic families were living doubled up when they became clients at A Child's

Place; the comparable figures for Black and White families were 37% and 22%, respectively. Nearly half of Black and White families lived in emergency shelters, whereas only 3% of Hispanic families did. How best to make such comparisons becomes complicated, however, because about two out of every three families moved between multiple homeless living arrangements during their homeless spell. As such, further comparisons are beyond the scope of this article but should be explored in the future.

The comparative analysis between homeless and at-risk families produced results with some similarities to trends in the previous research that was reviewed. Homeless parents in Charlotte were more likely than at-risk parents to be Black and to be single women. In addition, more homeless than at-risk parents reported receiving TANF. However, other important results differed in the sample of families from A Child's Place. Perhaps most importantly, previous research found no difference in employment between homeless and other low-income parents, but at-risk parents in Charlotte were more likely than homeless parents to be employed. In addition, past research seemed to indicate that homeless parents were less educated than other low-income parents, but this was not true among the parents from A Child's Place. Likewise, past research indicated that homeless parents were younger, more likely to be pregnant, and less likely to receive child support or food stamps than other low-income parents, but there was no difference between the two groups in Charlotte on any of those characteristics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the primary differences between homeless and at-risk families from A Child's Place was employment, which was reported more often by the latter group. Even when controlling for the number of adults in the family, at-risk families were more likely to report being employed. Efforts must be taken to determine whether the lack of employment is primarily

a cause or a consequence of homelessness and to determine ways to encourage homeless parents, especially single mothers, to work. One option would be to reduce barriers, such as the lack of childcare, which was more commonly a problem among the homeless parents than among the at-risk parents. In addition, future research should take into account the complexities of employment—regarding stability, seasonality, and legality, in particular—among homeless parents.

One very troubling result is the low percentage of homeless families that moved into subsidized housing. Only 40% of homeless families moved into permanent housing while they were clients at A Child's Place. Of those, only 31% moved into subsidized housing. This means that only about 12% of all the homeless families moved into subsidized housing. The reason for this low percentage is simple: Section 8, public, and other subsidized housing is in low supply in Charlotte, as in other cities across the nation. Of the families that moved into Section 8 housing, about half already had vouchers that they had been using previously; they needed help finding a new apartment because they relocated or their former apartment was in poor condition. The very tight supply of subsidized housing for homeless families is particularly troubling in light of research indicating that housing subsidies contribute greatly to the long-term stability of formerly homeless families (Rog, 1999; Shinn, 1997). In one study of families who had lived in emergency shelters in New York City, the receipt of a housing subsidy was the primary predictor of whether the families would remain in permanent housing several years after their homeless episode ended. In fact, families that received housing subsidies upon leaving homeless shelters had odds of being stabilized in permanent housing that were more than 20 times the odds of other formerly homeless families (Shinn et al., 1998). Other research conducted in New York (Wong, Culhane, & Kuhn, 1997) found that the hazard of reentering a shelter was much lower

for families that exited their first spell of homelessness to subsidized housing than for other families. If the importance of a housing subsidy as a protective factor against repeated homelessness is as important in Charlotte as it is in New York, then subsidy allocations must be increased to promote the long-term stability of formerly homeless families.

Although the outlook may appear bleak for homeless families struggling to move into permanent housing in Charlotte, the outlook appears much better for the continued stability of the at-risk families, most of whom were no longer facing eviction or foreclosure when their cases closed. This speaks to the importance of emergency rent assistance, which was not typically provided directly by A Child's Place, but instead caseworkers helped families secure such funds from other agencies. The success of such assistance, as well as landlord mediation efforts, has been touted elsewhere (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Choi & Snyder, 1999; Winship, 2001) as perhaps one of the keys to preventing homelessness. In addition, the vast majority of at-risk families received assistance with budgeting as part of their case plans. The effectiveness of such instruction when provided by social workers should be explored further as a positive strategy, given the overall success of the at-risk families from A Child's Place.

Results from this research cannot be generalized to homeless families in other cities or even to homeless families in Charlotte that do not work with A Child's Place. Given the potentially powerful results regarding the importance of employment and subsidized housing, as well as the many similarities between homeless families and families at risk of homelessness, more research—both in Charlotte and elsewhere—should be conducted. In particular, such research should aim to include not only families with school-age children and should do so without excluding families from diverse living arrangements.

Finally, although this research did not explore the impacts of homelessness on children, the sample of homeless children from A Child's Place provides the opportunity for such research. Of particular interest would be an analysis of the benefits to children of working with such agencies and the degree to which those benefits can counteract some of the negative educational and behavioral impacts of homelessness. The model of A Child's Place—that of an agency designed to work closely with schools and to assist homeless and at-risk families with school-age children on a wide range of issues—is perhaps one-of-a-kind. But a similar model has been promoted in the literature (Choi & Snyder, 1999) as ideal for addressing the needs of homeless students. The successes of students from A Child's Place could possibly substantiate such claims, if properly researched.

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CHAPTER 4

MINORITY FAMILIES' EXITS FROM HOMELESSNESS IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA[15]

[15] Vanderford, S. E. and J. Coverdill. To be submitted to *Social Service Review*.

Researchers have set out to answer many questions about family homelessness: What characterizes homeless families? What are the causes of homelessness among families? Are personal characteristics or the social and political structure more important in shaping families' experiences with homelessness? How do spells of homelessness affect families, especially children? More recently, attention has been focused on the question of how families effectively exit homelessness. Such event history analyses of families' exits have two main advantages over research attempting to determine the causes of homelessness. First, the population of interest—currently homeless families—can be defined and sampled more easily than can the population of families at risk of becoming homeless. Second, events can be ordered in relation to when a family exits homelessness, which lessens concerns over ambiguity of causal order.

The research presented in this article used event history analysis techniques to study exits from homelessness among families with school-age (Pre-K through 12th grade) children in Charlotte, North Carolina. Specifically, it aimed to build in two ways on previous research that identified personal characteristics related to a family's hazard of exiting homelessness. First, the data came from a city where family homelessness has not been studied in such a manner. Second, the data allowed for the inclusion of families from a broad range of homeless living arrangements, including families living doubled up. Before conducting such studies of exits from homelessness, two definitional questions must be answered: Who is homeless?, and What is an exit?

Who is Homeless?

In an attempt to lessen some of the confusion over who is and who is not actually homeless, Argeriou, McCarty, and Mulvey (1995) set out to clarify an operational definition of *homelessness*. For two years, beginning in August 1988, homeless adults entering six public

detoxification centers in Boston were asked questions regarding the duration of their homelessness and their dwelling place(s) during homelessness. The questions identified 18 specific types of dwelling places. Based on their final sample of 839 homeless individuals, the researchers concluded that homelessness is actually a continuous, rather than a binary, variable and that different individuals were at different points along a continuum between homeless and nearly homeless. Said in another way, "the choice [homeless people make] is between different states of homelessness: staying at a friend's house, sleeping on the streets, spending the night in a shelter" ("The homeless," 1994-5, p. 50).

However, researchers and practitioners often do not have the luxury of considering homelessness as a continuum. They must eventually draw a line between people who are homeless and, therefore, can be included in research or are eligible for services, and people who are not homeless. Where they draw that line will have implications for their results and must be kept in mind when making comparisons or drawing conclusions.

The research reviewed for this article represents two approaches to defining homelessness. On the one hand, some researchers (Wong, Culhane, & Kuhn, 1997) have limited their operational definitions of homeless to families residing in emergency shelters. On the other hand, Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) used a more specific definition of homeless; they counted as homeless any families that slept in one or more of certain environments in the 30 days before their interview. The sleeping conditions considered as homeless were: on the street or in another unconventional accommodation (such as a vehicle or abandoned building), in any temporary shelter, or in a hotel or motel paid for by a voucher.

The research described in this article was based on an even broader definition of homelessness. In 2001, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act stated that children and youth would be considered homeless if they:

> are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement…[or] are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. (Sec. 725(2)(B))

The data source for this research was chosen specifically to allow for the inclusion of homeless families from a wide range of living accommodations. The sample of homeless families includes families living in unconventional accommodations (such as vehicles, abandoned buildings, and public areas), emergency shelters, transitional housing, motels, and doubled-up arrangements.

What is an Exit?

Researchers have assumed different degrees of specificity in defining what constitutes an exit in their studies of transitions out of homelessness. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) employed a specific operational definition for exits. They considered exits to be only non-institutional (*i.e.*, not to a hospital or a jail) transitions out of homelessness that lasted for at least 30 days. They did not include institutional transitions because exits to hospitals and jails were deemed out of the control of the homeless persons. Wong et al. (1997) used the same 30-day minimum requirement, but they included all forms of exits. The purpose of the 30-day requirement was to count as exits only those departures that were somewhat stable.

The research described in this article considered all non-institutional departures from homelessness to be exits. Because of the broad definition of homeless, which included families living doubled up, exits could only happen in the form of families' moves into their own (rented or owned) permanent housing. No requirement was set for the minimum length of official exits from homelessness because the data typically did not continue tracking families once they exiting homelessness.

Literature Review

Some of the primary event history analyses of exits from homelessness (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Dworsky & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Wright, Mare, & Westerfelt, 1996; Sosin, Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990) have studied exits of homeless *individuals* or have grouped families and individuals together; their results are not reviewed. Two studies have used event history analysis techniques to model exit hazard rates among homeless families. Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) used Cox's proportional hazards model to estimate exit hazard rates separately for three groups—single men, single women, and unmarried women with children. Wong et al. (1997) used Cox's proportional hazards model to estimate a competing-risk hazard rate regression model of exit hazard rates for homeless families, where four specific types of exits were considered.

Wong and Piliavin (1997a, 1997b) compared homeless-housed transitions among single men, single women, and unmarried women with children, all of whom were randomly sampled from shelter residents and clients of agencies providing meals in Alameda County, California in April 1991. Results from the within-subsample analysis of homeless women with children are based on the 66 women with children who were interviewed in both an initial and a follow-up round of interviews. Almost all of the women with children exited their initial spell of

homelessness, but only two variables were significant in explaining exit rates. The presence of an alcohol problem was negatively associated with exit hazard rates, and the amount of cash benefits received from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Disability Insurance, Social Security, Unemployment Compensation, and Veterans Benefits was positively related to exit hazard rates. The authors acknowledged that their results could not be generalized to families in other cities or families that do not use shelters or meal agencies.

Wong et al. (1997) conducted a study of exits from public family shelters in New York City between 1988 and 1993. Data on over 27,000 families in the New York City family shelter system were obtained from the organization's database, the Homeless Emergency Referral System (HOMES). Exits were divided into four categories: exits to subsidized housing, exits to an apartment found by the family or to their previous residence (*i.e.*, own housing), exits to unknown arrangements, and other exits (involuntary exits, exits to shared lodging, and exits to shelters for domestic violence victims). At the one-percent level, most variables were significant in predicting at least one type of exit. Families with older heads of household experienced lower hazard rates for all types of exits than did families with younger household heads. Overall, African American and Hispanic families had lower exit hazard rates than families of other races or ethnicities. Having more adults in a family also lowered the hazard rates of exit to three places (subsidized housing, other destinations, and unknown accommodations). Having more children in a family lowered the exit hazard rate to unknown arrangements, whereas having a pregnant family member raised the exit hazard rate to unknown arrangements. Families that received public assistance had higher exit hazard rates into subsidized housing and lower exit hazard rates into unknown arrangements than did other families. Among those who cited domestic violence

as their reason for shelter admission, hazard rates for exits to subsidized housing, own housing, and other destinations were higher, compared to those who cited economic reasons. Among those who cited environment-related (as opposed to economic) reasons for homelessness, hazard rates for exits to subsidized housing and own housing were higher, whereas exit hazard rates to unknown destinations were lower. Admission during the winter or spring increased exit hazard rates to subsidized housing, and admission during the spring also increased exit hazard rates to other destinations. Finally, year of shelter entry was significant for all types of exits, with the most consistent pattern being that exit hazard rates to unknown arrangements fell over time.

These studies provide evidence of variables that seem to be related to families' hazard rates of exiting homelessness. The results provide a good basis for future research, but they cannot be generalized outside of the locations where the studies took place (New York City and Alameda County, California). They also cannot be generalized to other groups of homeless families, such as those living doubled up with family or friends. This research attempts to contribute in the areas of both of those gaps.

Data Source

The data for this research came from the case files of A Child's Place, an organization in Charlotte, NC that provides supportive services (such as assisting parents in locating housing or applying for social services and providing school supplies and clothing to children) to homeless families and families at risk of becoming homeless. The staff members at A Child's Place work with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) public school system to identify homeless and at-risk children in the schools, with an emphasis on the Pre-K and elementary levels. A detailed history of A Child's Place and its methods of working with homeless families is available elsewhere (Yon & Mickelson, 2002).

All information on clients of A Child's Place that was recorded either on paper or electronically was accessed to create the dataset for this research. Each family's file included information covering the entire period of time that they worked with A Child's Place, until they moved into permanent housing or their case was closed for some other reason. Examples of the items in families' files are the agency's intake forms, copies of applications for monetary assistance from other agencies, requests for school supplies, and case notes from meetings between the family and the social worker. Copies of the most commonly used intake forms are available elsewhere (Vanderford, 2006). The information used in this research focused on families' exits out of homelessness and characteristics that might help explain those exits.

Homeless families from A Child's Place had important similarities and differences with homeless families from other samples (*i.e.*, Burt, 2001; Institute for Children and Poverty, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999). The families from A Child's Place are described in detail elsewhere (Vanderford & Sweaney, 2006), but key comparisons are highlighted here. Both at A Child's Place and elsewhere, homeless parents were primarily single mothers in their low- to mid-thirties with an average of two to three children. They were rarely employed, and their incomes were low, but alcohol and drug abuse were not predominant problems. In other ways, homeless families from A Child's Place differed from homeless families described in past research. Black families were more heavily represented in the sample of families from Charlotte. The percentage of homeless parents from A Child's Place with less than a high school diploma (35%) fell between more extreme estimates from earlier research. Reports of both domestic violence and food stamp receipt were lower among homeless families from A Child's Place than found in previous research. Additionally, although 23% of children from A Child's Place were four years old or younger, such young children were less represented than in previous research. Young

homeless children may be underrepresented among families from A Child's Place because recruitment of families is focused in schools. At the same time, older homeless children may be represented more accurately at A Child's Place than in samples that focus on homeless shelters; nearly 17% of the homeless children from A Child's Place were age 13 or older.

One final way in which the families from A Child's Place differed from families included in previous research is the wide range of living accommodations represented, including a large percentage of families that were doubled up during their homeless spell. Because A Child's Place is not a residential program, it is able to assist homeless families living in any homeless situation, such as shelters, transitional housing, motels, unconventional accommodations, and doubled-up arrangements. In addition, families may remain clients as long as they are homeless or struggling to maintain stable housing, regardless of whether they move.

Sample

The original sample for this research comprised 235 homeless families that became clients of A Child's Place between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005. This sample accounted for a majority of the agency's homeless clients for that period of time. Each of 10 families was excluded for one of three reasons: The family did not include at least one minor child (two families), the family head was not identified as Hispanic, Black, or White (three families), or there was no way to estimate the length of time that the family was homeless (five families). In addition, it is possible that a very small number of families' case files were lost or destroyed before data collection commenced. Finally, to prevent double counting of any clients, families that were clients of A Child's Place on two or more separate occasions during the time period being considered were only included in the data for their last client episode.

Preliminary analyses led to a further reduction of the sample to include only the 215 Black or Hispanic families. The 20 White families in the original sample were removed because of indications of selection bias. First, the proportion of White families in the sample from A Child's Place (8.5%) was much lower than the proportions in previous research (38-44%) (Burt, 2001; Institute for Children and Poverty, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999). Second, a bivariate event history analysis indicated that White families had significantly lower exit hazard rates than either Black or Hispanic families. Hispanic families' hazard of exiting homelessness was no different than that of Black families, but White families' hazard of exiting homelessness was only about 37% as high as Black families' hazard. This result is exactly the opposite of what was expected based on previous research. Drawing from these two findings, we decided that White families were underobserved at A Child's Place because, on average, they have very high hazards of exiting homelessness. Because A Child's Place is not a residential facility and families often did not become clients until after they had been homeless for some time (on average, six months), we believed that White families in Charlotte tended to exit homelessness before they even connected with A Child's Place. Therefore, the small sample of White families was a biased sample because it excluded the majority of White families, who were believed to have exited homelessness relatively quickly.

Table 4.1 describes the sample of minority (Black or Hispanic) homeless families on all the variables in the final event history model, as well as others that were tested in preliminary models. The racial breakdown, which reveals a predominance of Black families, is shown, but no distinctions were made between Black and Hispanic families in the analyses. Because of the small number of Hispanic families, a multivariate analysis that controlled for race would be limited in its ability to incorporate other categorical variables. Furthermore, as already described,

Table 4.1

Characteristics of the Sample of Minority Homeless Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Percent or Mean (St. dev.)
Race/ethnicity of the family head	
Black	86.5%
Hispanic	13.5%
Length of homelessness after case opening (in days)	93.6 (80.9)
Exited homelessness	43.3%
Length of homelessness before case opening (in days)	174.5 (530.7)
Family type	
Single female	84.1%
Single male	3.7%
Married couple	6.1%
Cohabiting couple	6.1%
Number of children	2.4 (1.3)
Age of the family head	33.7 (8.3)
Family head or spouse/partner is pregnant, or a child is an infant	19.5%
Educational level of the family head	
Less than a high school diploma	38.6%
High school diploma or GED	20.0%
Some college, 2-year college degree, or vocational training	34.9%
4-year college degree	5.1%
Not stated	1.4%
At least one adult family member was employed	30.2%
Monthly non-wage income (in dollars)[a]	406.5 (380.4)
Length of time that the family head lived in Mecklenburg County (in years)	10.9 (14.2)
Reported domestic violence problems	20.9%
Reported drug or alcohol problems	25.6%

Variable name	Percent or Mean (St. dev.)
Year in which the family became a client	
2002	31.2%
2003	33.5%
2004	27.4%
2005	7.9%
Season in which the family became a client	
Winter	29.3%
Spring	9.3%
Summer	29.3%
Fall	32.1%
n	215

[a] From Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security, child support, and food stamps.

the preliminary event history analyses testing for racial effects revealed no difference between Black and Hispanic families' exit hazard rates.

The true dependent variable for the event history analysis is the hazard rate of exiting homelessness, which is discussed in greater detail later. For purposes of describing the sample, the hazard can be thought of as deriving from two components—the length of time a family was homeless after their case opened and whether or not a family moved into permanent housing. First, the average family was homeless for about three months after becoming a client at A Child's Place until either they exited homelessness (*i.e.*, moved into permanent housing) or their case was closed for some other reason. Second, about 43% of families exited homelessness into permanent housing. The 57% of families that did not exit homelessness are considered censored, an idea that will be explored in detail later.

The remaining variables in Table 4.1 were all candidate independent variables for the event history analysis. The length of homelessness before case opening represents the number of days that a family was homeless before becoming a client at A Child's Place. This time—on average, six months—cannot be included as part of the dependent variable because families were not at risk of an observable exit from homelessness before they enrolled at A Child's Place (Allison, 1995). To summarize the remaining variables, the typical Black or Hispanic homeless family from A Child's Place was headed by a single 34-year-old female and included two or three children. The majority of homeless family heads had a high school diploma or less, and employment was not very common among the adults in homeless families. Each of domestic violence and drug or alcohol problems was reported by approximately one quarter or less of homeless families.

Methods

Statistical Approach

Event history analysis is a family of methods than can be used to analyze data on the timing of events (such as exits from homelessness), including the possibility that not everyone in the sample experiences the event. In general, these methods can be divided into parametric methods that use maximum likelihood estimation techniques and semiparametric methods that use partial likelihood estimation techniques. Cox's semiparametric proportional hazards model was chosen as the statistical model for this research. Cox's model is semiparametric because a regression equation is specified, but the event time distribution is left unspecified. Therefore, partial likelihood estimates are based on the order of events but not the exact times at which they occur (Allison, 1984, 1995). Wong et al. (1997) explained that the form of time dependency is

not important in studies of exits from homelessness, so Cox's proportional hazards model is a logical option.

Because other researchers (Allgood & Warren, 2003) have chosen to use parametric methods, a sensitivity analysis for model specification was conducted. The final model was estimated with both Cox's proportional hazards model and a parametric model using the Weibell distribution. The two approaches resulted in no major differences in estimates or substantive implications of the findings. To facilitate comparison of results with those from the two previous event history analyses of families' exits from homelessness, results from Cox's proportional hazards model are presented in this article. In addition, this model specification allows for the possibility of incorporating variables with values that change over time in future extensions of this research.

For continuous data, Cox's proportional hazards model can be represented as a regression model in the following way:

$$\log(h(t)) = a(t) + \Sigma b_i x_i, \qquad [1]$$

where a(t) is an unspecified function of time, and each x_i represents one independent variable. In producing partial likelihood estimates, only information about $\Sigma b_i x_i$, not a(t), is considered. The resulting estimates are unbiased and normally distributed (Allison, 1984, 1995). The left-hand side of the equation is the log of the continuous-time hazard rate. The hazard rate, h(t), is represented mathematically by the limit of a ratio, where the numerator is the probability that an individual experiences an event in a given interval (t, t + s), given that she was at risk at time t, and the denominator is the length of the interval, s. The limit is taken as the interval length gets infinitesimally small.

$$h(t) = \lim_{s \to 0}(P(t, t + s)/s) \qquad [2]$$

The hazard rate is not directly observed, but rather it can be thought of as "the unobserved rate at which events occur" (Allison, 1984, p. 23). Importantly, the hazard is not a probability, as it can be greater than one. In the context of this article, a family's hazard can be interpreted as the rate at which the family can expect to leave homelessness.

Preliminary Bivariate Analyses

Because of the large number of potential variables and the relatively small sample size, bivariate analyses were used to assess each variable's potential predictive power. Table 4.2

Table 4.2

Selected Results of Bivariate Cox Proportional Hazards Models of Minority Families' Exits from Homelessness

Variable name	Coefficient	Standard error
Number of children in the family	0.021	0.093
Family headed by single female [vs. not]	0.053	0.292
Family head has education beyond high school [vs. not]	-0.302	0.219
Age of the family head*	0.021	0.012
Natural log of monthly non-wage income	0.044	0.035
At least one adult family member was employed [vs. not]**	0.457	0.216
Year of case opening [omitted: 2002]		
2003	0.092	0.280
2004	0.331	0.263
2005	0.591	0.433
n	215[a]	

[a] Complete case analysis was used. Three observations were missing information on education, and two were missing information on age, so the effective sample sizes for those bivariate analyses were 212 and 213, respectively.

* $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$

shows selected results from these bivariate analyses. Variables not shown in the table did not approach statistical significance.

Results

Few of the candidate independent variables in Table 4.1 were significantly related to a family's hazard of exiting homelessness. In fact, most variables were so far from significant that they were omitted from the final multivariate model to allow for a better overall model fit. The results of two model specifications are shown in Table 4.3. The variables used in these models differ from those described earlier in two ways. First, 2004 and 2005 were combined for the categorical time-trend variable because the analysis seemed particularly sensitive to the small

Table 4.3

Results of Cox Proportional Hazards Models of Minority Families' Exits from Homelessness

	Model 1		Model 2	
Variable name	Coefficient	St. error	Coefficient	St. error
Age of family head	0.030	0.013**	0.032	0.013**
Number of children	0.056	0.097	0.039	0.098
Family headed by single female [vs. not]	0.110	0.296	0.259	0.304
Year of case opening [omitted: 2002]				
2003	0.166	0.286	0.135	0.286
2004 or 2005	0.537	0.265**	0.454	0.266*
Natural log of monthly non-wage income			0.072	0.038*
At least one adult was employed [vs. not]			0.549	0.232**
n[a]	213		213	
Model likelihood ratio chi square	7.829		15.332**	

[a] Complete case analysis was used, so two observations were deleted because of missing values for age.

* $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$

cell size for families that became clients in 2005 (a result of data collection ending halfway through that year). Second, the natural log of monthly non-wage income, rather than the dollar value of such income, was used, as in previous research (Wong & Piliavin, 1997a).

Even in these two models, which contain few independent variables, little is statistically significant in explaining minority families' hazards of exiting homelessness. In fact, Model 1 contains so little predictive power that the overall model is not even significant. Model 2, which is only different in that it includes income and employment variables, is significant overall.

Hazard ratios are shown for significant variables only in Table 4.4. For all variables except for income, these are calculated by exponentiating the coefficients. Because the natural log of income was used in the model but interpretations are more meaningful in terms of dollar amounts, the hazard ratio is found by raising the desired changed in income ($10 in Table 4.4) to the coefficient from the multivariate model. Interpretations of these hazard ratios provide evidence of the strength of each variable's relationship with hazard rates. Controlling for the other variables in each model, every year of increase in the family head's age is related to an approximate 3% increase in a minority family's hazard of exiting homelessness. When only the variables in Model 1 are controlled, minority families that became clients at A Child's Place in

Table 4.4

Hazard Ratios of Exiting Homelessness Among Minority Families from A Child's Place

Variable name	Hazard ratio	
	Model 1	Model 2
Age of family head [for a one-year increase]	1.03	1.03
Case opened in 2004 or 2005 [vs. 2002]	1.71	1.57
Monthly non-wage income [for a $10 increase]		1.18
At least one adult was employed [vs. not]		1.73

2004 or 2005 had a hazard of exiting homelessness that was 71% greater than the exit hazard of minority families that became clients in 2002. However, that time trend effect diminishes slightly when economic variables are entered in Model 2. The relative success of clients in 2004 and 2005 compared to earlier clients is a result of both higher non-wage incomes and better employment in the latter years. With each $10 increase in a minority family's monthly non-wage income, their hazard of exiting homelessness increases by 18%. Interestingly, non-wage income was not significant on its own in the bivariate analysis; when not controlled, employment status suppresses the effect of non-wage income. Finally, a family with at least one employed adult has a hazard of exiting homelessness that is 73% greater than the hazard of a similar family without an employed adult.

The final stage of analysis involved a sensitivity analysis for informative censoring. As already stated, families that did not exit homelessness while they were clients at A Child's Place were censored. Censoring happened for different reasons for different families, as shown in Figure 4.1. Censoring that is independent of a family's exit hazard, controlling for all other variables in the model, is not particularly concerning (Allison, 1995). Such censoring is most likely represented by the small group of clients that were censored when A Child's Place was forced to close some of their cases because of budget cuts. However, censoring that is related to a family's exit hazard, even after the other variables in the model are controlled, is a reason for concern (Allison, 1995). For example, it is very plausible that the families that were censored because they were uncooperative had lower hazards of exiting homelessness than other families, *ceteris paribus.* Such censoring can seriously bias results (Allison, 1995). Because nearly 60% of the sample was censored and at least some of the censoring mechanisms appear informative, sensitivity analyses were conducted.

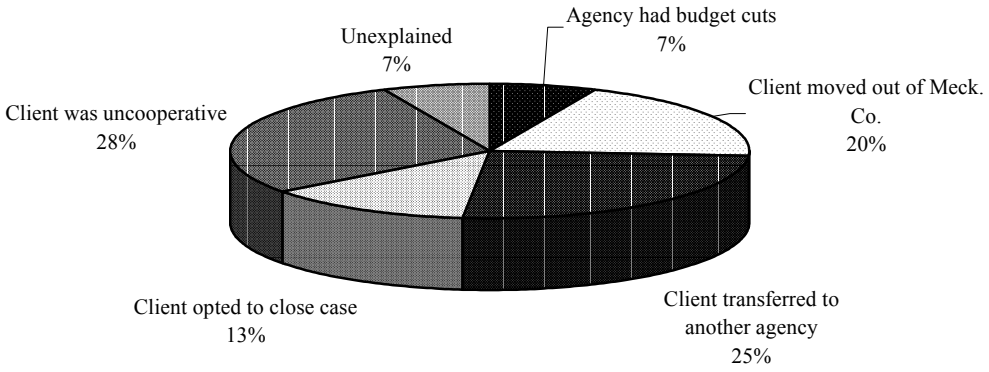

Figure 4.1. Censoring mechanisms among minority homeless families from A Child's Place.

Testing for sensitivity to informative censoring involves implementing one or more fairly extreme assumptions and running the analysis again (Allison, 1995). Certain of the censoring mechanisms in particular (when clients opted to close their cases and when clients were uncooperative) might be indicative of families with inherently lower hazards of exiting homelessness. However, results changed little when it was assumed that such families were homeless for at least as long as any other family in the sample. Even assuming the extreme—that all censored families were homeless for at least as long as any other family—changed results little.

Discussion

Providing services to assist homeless families effectively requires an understanding of what helps families exit homelessness and move into permanent housing. Relying on information

about what caused families to become homeless may be insufficient, especially when causes for homelessness are not identified easily by families themselves. Reason for homelessness was not used as an independent variable in this research because few clients reported a single cause for their homelessness. In most cases, homelessness was identified as being the result of a combination of relatively vague factors, such as not having enough money. The idea that homelessness is the result of the interactions of many factors has been explored in detail by other researchers (for example, Hudson, 1998). While homelessness may often result from the confluence of many characteristics or circumstances, event history analysis can identify specific factors that aid or harm families' abilities to exit homelessness. Information about such factors can instruct homeless service providers on both the types of families that might require more attention to get moved into permanent housing and the types of services that might have the most success in helping families move into permanent housing.

The results of this first-ever study of families' exits from homelessness in Charlotte, NC indicate that non-wage income and employment status may be two of the most important factors in helping families exit homelessness. Among minority families that were clients of A Child's Place, it was not personal characteristics such as drug or alcohol abuse or educational level that shaped their experiences with moving into permanent housing. Rather, it was the level of support they received from societal safety nets and how well they fared in the modern job market. Such results confirm the prediction of Burt, Aron, and Lee (2001), who suggested that, as economic structural conditions for low-income families deteriorate, even families without particular personal vulnerabilities will more easily become homeless. In the perennial debate over whether family homelessness is more closely connected to structural conditions or personal characteristics, the preliminary evidence from Charlotte weighs on the side of structural

conditions. As future researchers contribute to this debate, they should attempt to refine the measurements of employment and income to produce more meaningful results about those variables. For example, some of the jobs held by homeless parents from A Child's Place were seasonal, temporary, or off-the-books and did not represent what would commonly be considered stable, long-term employment. Characteristics of employment, such as seasonality, stability, and legality, should be incorporated into future studies of families' exits from homelessness.

The primary importance of non-wage income and employment in families' abilities to exit homelessness might be considered evidence of a mismatch between income and housing prices in Charlotte. In 2005, the Fair Market Rent on a two-bedroom apartment in Mecklenburg County was $680, but the maximum rent affordable to households earning 30% of the Area Median Income or less was $469 (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2005). The effects of such an affordability gap can be alleviated by either increasing families' incomes—through wages or non-wage benefits—or lowering the price of housing. Subsidized housing potentially could have helped many of the homeless families from A Child's Place, but Section 8, public, and other subsidized housing is in low supply in Charlotte, as in other cities across the nation. Only about 12% of the homeless families from A Child's Place were able to move into subsidized housing. The other families had to compete for housing in a market where they are generally priced out, and the majority of them did not secure permanent housing.

Non-wage income also may be seen as a measure of general human capital. A homeless parent's ability to secure income from sources such as TANF and food stamps may reflect skills and qualities such as self-management, persistence, and an ability to navigate administrative bureaucracy. Based on interviews with homeless mothers, Lindsey (1996) concluded that

mothers perceived individual characteristics—persistence, motivation, responsibility, and independence, for example—as integral to their ability to exit homelessness.

Another important result related to race. Black and Hispanic families had equal hazards of exiting homelessness, but White families had a significantly lower exit hazard. Wong et al. (1997) similarly found an equivalent hazard between Blacks and Hispanics in New York City, but they found Whites to have a significantly higher exit hazard rate. Given the relatively small and predominantly Black sample for the research presented in this article, results about racial effects cannot be given much weight at this point. Larger samples of homeless families in Charlotte should be studied to ascertain a better understanding of any relation between race and exit hazard rates.

Among families that did not move into permanent housing, the largest group was living doubled up with family or friends when their case was closed. Although such doubled-up arrangements are not often considered in researchers' or even practitioners' definitions of homelessness, families with children are officially defined as homeless when they double up (McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act, 2001). Little attention has been paid to this portion of the homeless family population, but evidence from A Child's Place indicates that doubling up is common. Future research should focus on identifying differences among different segments of the homeless family population, as well as determining whether factors that contribute to families' exits from homelessness differ among families living in different arrangements.

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CHAPTER 5

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOMELESS FAMILIES IN SHELTERS AND THOSE LIVING ELSEWHERE[16]

[16] Vanderford, S. E. To be submitted to *Social Problems*.

A recent survey in 24 cities across the nation found that about one out of every three homeless persons in the U.S. is a member of a homeless family with children (Lowe, Slater, Welfley, & Beard, 2005). As shocking as this statistic might be, it may actually underrepresent the growing problem of homelessness among American families. This survey, like most other research related to homeless families, focused on families living in emergency shelters. Researchers largely have ignored the possibly substantial population of homeless families living doubled up with family or friends, as well as families living in motels or even less conventional arrangements, such as on the street or in cars. When families living in unconventional places, motels, or doubled-up arrangements have been included in research, they typically have been grouped together with families living in shelters. Such an approach ignores the possibility that groups of families living in various environments differ in significant ways.

One study (Letiecq, Anderson, & Koblinsky, 1998) drew comparisons among families living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and doubled-up arrangements. Each of the 92 homeless families interviewed for that research was headed by a women and included a preschooler enrolled in Head Start in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area. Each family lived in one of three homeless arrangements: emergency shelters (31 families), transitional housing (44 families), and doubled-up arrangements (17 families). Both similarities and differences were found among the three groups. The mean age of the women, which ranged from 25.5 to 27.5, was not significantly different across the groups. Educational level also did not differ, with the majority (84%-88%) of women in each group having no more than a high school diploma. The two main differences found were in relation to marital status and level of social support. Doubled-up women were significantly more likely to be married than were women living in emergency shelters or transitional housing. Women living in doubled-up arrangements also

showed signs of having more social support than other homeless women. The authors encouraged future researchers to study homeless families living in diverse environments.

This article presents follow-up analyses from earlier descriptive (Vanderford & Sweaney, 2006) and event history (Vanderford & Coverdill, 2006) studies of a group of homeless families in Charlotte, North Carolina. Although the homeless families in the sample lived in a broad range of homeless living situations, up until now they have been treated as a single group of homeless families. The purpose of this research was to explore differences that might exist between families living in different arrangements—in terms of both their characteristics and their patterns of exit from homelessness. In particular, this research explores differences between families that lived in an emergency shelter or transitional housing unit during their homeless spell and families that did not. Homeless families living in such shelters have been the focus of most past research on family homelessness. As of yet, there is little to indicate how much these families have in common with families that never stay in shelters. If the two groups are substantially different, then researchers must challenge themselves to find ways to broaden the types of families included in their research. Otherwise, policies will be based on evidence that relates to only a portion of the homeless family population.

Data and Sample

The data for this research came from the case files of A Child's Place, which is an organization in Charlotte, NC that provides supportive services to homeless families and families at risk of becoming homeless. The staff members at A Child's Place work with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) public school system to identify homeless and at-risk children in the schools. Because A Child's Place is not a residential program, it is able to assist families living in any homeless situation, such as shelters, transitional housing, motels, unconventional

accommodations, and doubled-up arrangements. The sample for this research comprises 235 homeless families that became clients of A Child's Place between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005. More details about the data collection and the sample are available elsewhere (Vanderford & Coverdill, 2006; Vanderford & Sweaney, 2006).

The sample of homeless families from A Child's Place had important similarities and differences with other samples of homeless families (*i.e.*, Burt, 2001; Institute for Children and Poverty, 2000; The Urban Institute, 1999). Similarities included the predominance of single mothers who were rarely employed, had low incomes, reported few alcohol or drug problems, and had an average of two to three children. The primary difference between families from A Child's Place and other samples of homeless families related to the wide range of living accommodations—as opposed to just shelters—represented in this study. Other differences related to race, education, and the ages of children. Black families were more heavily represented in the sample of families from Charlotte. The percentage of homeless parents from A Child's Place with less than a high school diploma (35%) fell between more extreme estimates from earlier research. Although 23% of children from A Child's Place were four years old or younger, such young children were less represented than in previous research. Young homeless children may be underrepresented among families from A Child's Place because recruitment of families is focused in schools. At the same time, older homeless children may be represented more accurately at A Child's Place than in samples that focus on homeless shelters; nearly 17% of the homeless children from A Child's Place were age 13 or older.

Methods

Of particular importance for this aspect of the research is the fact that families' case files included longitudinal information about their living arrangements. When they became clients at

A Child's Place, families were asked where they were currently living, where they lived immediately previously, and how long they lived in each location. In addition, caseworkers documented moves that the families made while they were clients, until they either moved into permanent housing or had their case closed for another reason. Each family's current homeless spell was considered the time during which they were continuously homeless, including any time prior to the opening of their case at A Child's Place. Ideally, each family's whereabouts were recorded for the entire period of its homeless spell. One limitation of this research is that not all homeless living arrangements during the current homeless spell were available for all families. Some families were homeless for a longer continuous time in the past than what was documented in their housing histories, and other families had their cases closed while they were still homeless. In both cases, families may have lived in more homeless arrangements during their homeless spell than what is indicated in the data.

The detailed information about where families lived presented a range of options for structuring the comparisons between families living in different arrangements. Because two out of every three families moved between different homeless arrangements at some point during their homeless spell, the classification of families according to where they were living at a single point in time, such as when they became clients at A Child's Place, seemed arbitrary. Several alternative options were compared, and one was decided on, primarily due to its practical applicability. Families that lived in shelters or transitional housing units at any point during their current homeless spell are compared to families that did not. Two types of analyses are presented—descriptive comparisons of various characteristics of the families and a multivariate analysis of factors that contributed to families' exits from homelessness.

Results

Comparisons of selected characteristics between families that lived in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters,[17] or transitional housing units (referred to collectively as *shelters* from here forward) during their current homeless spell and families that did not are shown in Table 5.1. The two groups of families were very similar on many characteristics. In particular, the mean length of homelessness, both before and after becoming clients at A Child's Place, as well as the percentage of families that exited homelessness (*i.e.*, moved into permanent housing) did not differ statistically between the two groups. Other characteristics that were the same between the two groups of families were the mean number of children, the percentage of families with a pregnant adult or infant child, the educational level of the family head, the monthly non-wage income, and the percentage of families reporting domestic violence problems.

Some significant differences between the two groups were revealed, however. The mean age of the family head was higher among families that lived in shelters than among those that did not. Racial and ethnic distributions differed between families in the two groups; Whites appeared equally likely to be in both groups, but Blacks appeared more likely to live in shelters, and Hispanics appeared more likely not to live in shelters. Families that lived in shelters were more likely than other families to be headed by single females. Families that never lived in shelters during their current homelessness were nearly three times as likely to include at least one adult with a job. Families that did not live in shelters had lived in Mecklenburg County for an average of 2.5 times as long as families that lived in shelters. Finally, families that did not live in shelters were only about half as likely to report drug or alcohol problems.

[17] Research has shown residents of family homeless shelters and residents of domestic violence shelters to be similar in many ways (Stainbrook & Hornik, 2006).

Table 5.1

Characteristics of Families that Lived in Shelters and Families that Did Not

Variable name	Percent or Mean		Test statistic
	Lived in a shelter	Did not live in a shelter	
Length of homelessness after case opening (in days)	88.1	98.6	1.00
Exited homelessness	35.0%	47.3%	3.71
Length of homelessness before case opening (in days)	132.2	250.6	1.54
Single female*	86.2%	75.0%	4.73
Number of children	2.4	2.4	-0.01
Age of family head*	34.9	32.3	-2.50
Family head or spouse/partner is pregnant, or a child is an infant	18.7%	18.8%	1E-4
Race/ethnicity of family head***			20.24
Black	88.6%	68.8%	
Hispanic	3.3%	22.3%	
White	8.1%	8.9%	
Family head had a high school education or more	39.8%	41.4%	0.06
At least one adult family member was employed***	17.1%	47.3%	24.86
Monthly non-wage income (in dollars)	410.9	383.7	-0.52
Length of time that the family head lived in Mecklenburg County (in years)***	6.2	15.8	5.27
Reported domestic violence problems	24.4%	16.1%	2.50
Reported drug or alcohol problems**	34.2%	17.9%	8.01
n	123	112	

Note. Values are means for continuous variables and frequencies for categorical variables. Test statistics are from *t* tests for continuous variables and from *chi square* tests for categorical variables.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

A second stage of analysis for this comparison involved extending an event history analysis that was used to model families' exits from homelessness (Vanderford & Coverdill, 2006). The earlier analysis found that the White families should be excluded from the analysis.[18] Therefore, the analysis presented in this article also is based only on the sample of 215 minority families. The independent variables are those that were found significant in the previous research, plus an indicator variable for whether the family lived in a shelter or transitional housing unit at any time during their current homeless spell. Cox's proportional hazards model was used, and partial likelihood estimates are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Partial Likelihood Estimates from a Cox Proportional Hazards Model of Families' Exits from Homelessness

Variable name	Coefficient	St. error
Age of family head**	0.030	0.012
Year of case opening [omitted: 2002]		
2003	0.157	0.286
2004 or 2005*	0.441	0.266
Natural log of monthly non-wage income*	0.073	0.037
At least one adult was employed [vs. not]**	0.463	0.234
Family lived in a shelter during current homeless spell [vs. not]	-0.141	0.225
n	213[a]	
Model likelihood ratio chi square	14.819**	

[a] Two observations were deleted because the age of the family head was missing.

* $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$

[18] Preliminary results showed a lower hazard of exiting homelessness among White families than among Black and Hispanic families, which was the opposite of what was expected based on previous research. It was concluded that the White families were a biased sample of all homeless White families in Charlotte and represented only those with long spells of homelessness.

The results of this multivariate model of homeless families' exits from homelessness confirm what the bivariate comparisons indicated—that families that lived in shelters or transitional housing had about the same hazard of exiting homelessness into permanent housing as did other families.

Discussion

Although differences in exit patterns between families living in shelters and those not living in shelters were not identified in this sample of families from Charlotte, NC, other comparisons of the groups revealed important differences. In particular, the differences between the two groups of families in terms of marital status, employment status, length of time in the county, and drug or alcohol problems all seem to indicate that families that lived in shelters faced, on average, more obstacles than did other homeless families. To recap, families living in shelters were more often headed by single women, less often included an employed adult, on average had lived in Mecklenburg County for less time, and more often reported drug or alcohol problems. Further research using diverse samples of homeless families should attempt to substantiate these results.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this research is the fact that better longitudinal records of homeless families' living arrangements are needed before the topic can be given justice. Winship (2001) outlined many of the difficulties of evaluating programs that work with homeless families. Many of these difficulties pertain to policy-relevant research as well. In particular, Winship (2001) pointed out the problems that are associated with trying to track homeless families and the fact that follow-up meetings after families exit homelessness are often not conducted. The data that were used for this research are a perfect example of how messy organizational data related to homeless families can be. However, messiness of data is not an

excuse for avoiding a topic of research. If local policymakers are going to be effective in their attempts to address homelessness among families, their efforts must be based on the most accurate and complete picture of homeless families as possible.

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CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Each of Chapters 3-5 has addressed a different question related to homeless families using a sample of families from A Child's Place in Charlotte, North Carolina. Chapter 3 described the homeless families and compared them to families that were at risk of becoming homeless. Chapter 4 modeled families' exits from homelessness. And Chapter 5 explored differences between homeless families that lived in shelters and those that did not. The most important results from these three areas of research are summarized below. Then, the dissertation concludes with summary comments, as well as recommendations, based on all three areas of the research.

Descriptions of Homeless Families

Homeless families that were clients at A Child's Place in Charlotte, NC between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2005 seem to have much in common with homeless families from other samples. Homeless parents are primarily single mothers, with an average age in their low- to mid-thirties. Homeless families have an average of two to three children. Employment among homeless parents is rare and, when obtained, is often short-term and unstable. As a result of employment patterns, incomes are low. Although alcohol and drug abuse are not dominant problems among homeless parents, approximately one-quarter report having such abuse problems.

In other important ways, however, homeless families from A Child's Place differed from homeless families described in past research. Black families were more heavily represented in

the sample of families from Charlotte than in the NSHAPC or the Institute for Children and Poverty's Southern sample. Likewise, non-Hispanic White families were much less represented in Charlotte. Regarding education, the percentage of homeless parents from A Child's Place with less than a high school diploma (35%) fell between the more extreme estimates from earlier research. Domestic violence was reported by only about 20% of homeless families at A Child's Place, a much lower percentage than found in past research. Receipt of food stamps, while the most common benefit among the Charlotte homeless families, was less prevalent than among the families in the NSHAPC. These differences highlight the importance of accurate local portraits of homeless family populations to motivate service providers' and political leaders' responses to family homelessness.

The comparative analysis between homeless and at-risk families produced results with some similarities to trends in the previous research that was reviewed. Homeless parents in Charlotte were more likely than at-risk parents to be Black and to be single women. In addition, more homeless than at-risk parents reported receiving TANF. However, other important results differed in the sample of families from A Child's Place. Perhaps most importantly, previous research found no difference in employment between homeless and other low-income parents, but at-risk parents in Charlotte were more likely than homeless parents to be employed. In addition, past research seemed to indicate that homeless parents were less educated than other low-income parents, but this was not true among the parents from A Child's Place. Likewise, past research indicated that homeless parents were younger, more likely to be pregnant, and less likely to receive child support or food stamps than other low-income parents, but there was no difference between the two groups in Charlotte on any of those characteristics.

Models of Families' Exits from Homelessness

Providing services to assist homeless families effectively requires an understanding of what helps families exit homelessness and move into permanent housing. Relying on information about what caused families to become homeless may be insufficient, especially when causes for homelessness are not identified easily by families themselves. Reason for homelessness was not used as an independent variable in this research because few clients reported a single cause for their homelessness. In most cases, homelessness was identified as being the result of a combination of relatively vague factors, such as not having enough money. The idea that homelessness is the result of the interactions of many factors has been explored in detail by other researchers (for example, Hudson, 1998). While homelessness may often result from the confluence of many characteristics or circumstances, event history analysis can identify specific factors that aid or harm families' abilities to exit homelessness. Information about such factors can instruct homeless service providers on both the types of families that might require more attention to get moved into permanent housing and the types of services that might have the most success in helping families move into permanent housing.

The results of this first-ever study of families' exits from homelessness in Charlotte, NC indicate that non-wage income and employment status may be two of the most important factors in helping families exit homelessness. Among minority families that were clients of A Child's Place, it was not personal characteristics such as drug or alcohol abuse or educational level that shaped their experiences with moving into permanent housing. Rather, it was the level of support they received from societal safety nets and how well they fared in the modern job market. Such results confirm the prediction of Burt, Aron, and Lee (2001), who suggested that, as economic structural conditional for low-income families deteriorate, even families without particular

personal vulnerabilities will more easily become homeless. In the perennial debate over whether family homelessness is more closely connected to structural conditions or personal characteristics, the preliminary evidence from Charlotte weighs on the side of structural conditions.

Another important result from the event history analysis related to race. Black and Hispanic families had equal hazards of exiting homelessness, but White families had a significantly lower exit hazard. Wong et al. (1997) similarly found an equivalent hazard between Blacks and Hispanics in New York City, but they found Whites to have a significantly higher exit hazard rate. Given the relatively small and predominantly Black sample for the research presented in this dissertation, results about racial effects in Charlotte should be considered inconclusive at the moment.

Comparisons of Homeless Families Living in Different Environments

Although differences in exit patterns between families living in shelters and those not living in shelters were not identified in this sample of families from Charlotte, NC, other comparisons of the groups revealed important differences. In particular, the differences between the two groups of families in terms of marital status, employment status, length of time in the county, and drug or alcohol problems all seem to indicate that families that lived in shelters faced, on average, more obstacles than did other homeless families. To recap, families living in shelters were more often headed by single women, less often included an employed adult, on average had lived in Mecklenburg County for less time, and more often reported drug or alcohol problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Importance of Employment

The benefits of employment were revealed in the analyses for Chapters 3 and 4. First, one of the primary differences between homeless and at-risk families from A Child's Place was employment, which was reported more often by the latter group. Second, the presence of at least one employed adult in a family was one of the few significant predictors of families' hazards of exit from homelessness. Even when controlling for the number of adults in the family, at-risk families were more likely to report being employed.

Three challenges for practitioners and researchers stem from these results on employment. First, efforts must be taken to determine whether the lack of employment is primarily a cause or a consequence of homelessness. It surely acts as both, at different times and in different families. Helping families secure both employment and housing requires an understanding of the implications of different interrelations between these factors. In other words, families that are homeless because of a lack of employment may be very different from—and therefore require very different types of assistance than—families that lack employment due to their homelessness. Second, research should determine ways of encouraging homeless parents, especially single mothers, to work. One option would be to reduce barriers, such as the lack of childcare, which was more commonly a problem among the homeless parents than among the at-risk parents. Third, characteristics of employment—such as seasonality, stability, and legality—should be incorporated into future studies of families' exits from homelessness. Some of the jobs held by homeless parents from A Child's Place were seasonal, temporary, or off-the-books and did not represent what would commonly be considered stable, long-term employment. A full

understanding of the impact of employment on families' abilities to exit homelessness requires knowing more than just whether or not an adult in the family was working.

The Need for Housing Subsidies

The significance of non-wage income in families' abilities to exit homelessness might be considered evidence of a mismatch between income and housing prices in Charlotte, NC. In 2005, the Fair Market Rent on a two-bedroom apartment in Mecklenburg County was $680, but the maximum rent affordable to households earning 30% of the Area Median Income or less was $469 (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2005). The effects of such an affordability gap can be alleviated by either increasing families' incomes—through wages or non-wage benefits—or lowering the price of housing. Subsidized housing potentially could have helped many of the homeless families from A Child's Place, but Section 8, public, and other subsidized housing is in low supply in Charlotte, as in other cities across the nation. Only 40% of homeless families moved into permanent housing while they were clients at A Child's Place. Of those, only 31% moved into subsidized housing. This means that only about 12% of all the homeless families moved into subsidized housing. The other families had to compete for housing in a market where they are generally priced out, and the majority of them did not secure permanent housing.

The very tight supply of subsidized housing for homeless families is particularly troubling in light of research indicating that housing subsidies contribute greatly to the long-term stability of formerly homeless families (Rog, 1999; Shinn, 1997). In one study of families who had lived in emergency shelters in New York City, the receipt of a housing subsidy was the primary predictor of whether the families would remain in permanent housing several years after their homeless episode ended. In fact, families that received housing subsidies upon leaving homeless shelters had odds of being stabilized in permanent housing that were more than 20

times the odds of other formerly homeless families (Shinn et al., 1998; Stojanovic, Weitzman, Shinn, Labay, & Williams, 1999). Also conducted in New York, the research of Wong et al. (1997) found that the hazard of reentering a shelter was much lower for families that exited their first spell of homelessness to subsidized housing than for other families. If the importance of a housing subsidy as a protective factor against repeated homelessness is as important in Charlotte as it is in New York, then subsidy allocations must be increased to promote the long-term stability of formerly homeless families.

Successes in Preventing Homelessness

Although homeless families struggled to secure permanent affordable housing in Charlotte, families that came to A Child's Place because they feared becoming homeless fared much better. Most of these at-risk families were no longer facing eviction or foreclosure when their cases closed. This speaks to the importance of emergency rent assistance, which was not typically provided directly by A Child's Place, but instead caseworkers helped families secure such funds from other agencies. The success of such assistance, as well as landlord mediation efforts, has been touted elsewhere (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Choi & Snyder, 1999; Winship, 2001) as perhaps one of the keys to preventing homelessness. In addition, the vast majority of at-risk families received assistance with budgeting as part of their case plans. The effectiveness of such instruction when provided by social workers should be explored further as a positive strategy, given the overall success of the at-risk families from A Child's Place.

The Need for More Research

Results from this research cannot be generalized to homeless families in other cities or even to homeless families in Charlotte that do not work with A Child's Place. More research—both in Charlotte and elsewhere—should be conducted to explore further certain results from this

research. The importance of both employment and income in this study's results merit further research. The many similarities found between homeless families and families at risk of homelessness are also worth more study. More research should be conducted to ascertain a better understanding of any relation between race and exit hazard rates. In all of these cases, research should aim to include not just families with school-age children and should do so without excluding families from diverse living arrangements. Finally, researchers must continue to explore differences between families living in different homeless accommodations.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this research is the fact that better longitudinal records of homeless families' living arrangements are needed. Winship (2001) outlined many of the difficulties of evaluating programs that work with homeless families. Many of these difficulties pertain to policy-relevant research as well. In particular, Winship (2001) pointed out the problems that are associated with trying to track homeless families and the fact that follow-up meetings after families exit homelessness are often not conducted. The data that were used for this research are a perfect example of how messy organizational data related to homeless families can be. However, messiness of data is not an excuse for avoiding a topic of research. If local policymakers are going to be effective in their attempts to address homelessness among families, their efforts must be based on the most accurate and complete picture of homeless families as possible.

Finally, although this research did not explore the impacts of homelessness on children, the sample of homeless children from A Child's Place provides the opportunity for such research. Of particular interest would be an analysis of the benefits to children of working with such agencies and the degree to which those benefits can counteract some of the negative educational and behavioral impacts of homelessness. The model of A Child's Place—that of an

agency designed to work closely with schools and to assist homeless and at-risk families with school-age children on a wide range of issues—is perhaps one-of-a-kind. But a similar model has been promoted in the literature (Choi & Snyder, 1999) as ideal for addressing the needs of homeless students. The successes of students from A Child's Place could possibly substantiate such claims, if properly researched.

In sum, the results of this research and previous research have contributed a great deal to the understanding of homelessness in the United States, but there is much more to be learned. As long as there are families with children living homeless in this country, they should continue to be a focus of research. In particular, research should continue to address the question of what helps families move from homelessness into stable and permanent housing.

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APPENDIX A

DATA FORMS

The following 14 pages show the three most common standardized forms that were available in clients' files during the period of data collection. First is a Data Sheet, which typically was completed by a social worker when she first made contact with the parent(s). Initial meetings were often brief, so this form just addresses the most important information for the social worker to find out. Second is a 12-page Initial Assessment Interview, which was completed as soon as possible after a family became a client at A Child's Place. Typically, it was completed at the second meeting between the social worker and the parent(s), unless there was adequate time at the first meeting. Third is a statement of the client's Action Plan, which the social worker and parent(s) also normally completed during their first or second meeting. This plan includes statements of what the homeless or at-risk family needed, as well as what steps were required for them to have those needs satisfied.

A Child's Place
Data Sheet

Enrollment Date _____ Termination Date _____
Homeless or At Risk (Circle)

Applicant"s Name _____ Marital Status _____
D.O.B. _____ SS# _____ Race _____
Hispanic (Yes or No)
Current Address: _____
_____
Home# _____ Work# _____
Spouse: _____
D.O.B. _____ SS# _____ Race _____
Hispanic (Yes or No)

Last Permanent Address: _____
_____
How long at last residence: _____

Education & Training:
Highest Grade Completed: _____
Currently Enrolled: _____
Source of Income: Wages_____ TANF _____ SSI _____
Unemployment _____ Social Security _____ Food Stamps _____
Child Support _____
Currently Employed: _____

Last three Places of Employment:

Name	Position	Started	Ended	Salary	F/T P/T

Household Composition:

Name	Relationship	D.O.B.	SS#	Grade	School /Teacher

Reason For Homelessness:

_____Relocation	_____Family Breakup	_____Domestic Violence
_____Substance Abuse	_____Health Problems	_____Mental Health
_____Housing Problems	_____Insufficient Funds	_____Employment Issues
_____Fire	_____Disaster to Home	_____Other

— Confidential Client Data —

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview **Name:** _____

Referring Agency: _____ **Agency Contact:** _____

Date of Referral: ____/____/____ **Phone:** _____ **Fax:** _____

Assessment Date: ____/____/____ **Agency/Assessment Site:** _____

I. *Personal Information*

Notes: Shaded and boxed areas are required; these fields **must** be completed.
Enter 000-00-000 if no social security number is available.
Enter estimated birth date if unknown (use January 1st and an approximate year, i.e. 01/01/1960).

Applicant First Name: Last Name:

Social Security: / / Date of Birth: / / Age: Gender: ___Male ___Female

Race: ___Bi-racial ___Black/African-American ___Caucasian ___Pacific Island/Asian ___Native American/Alaskan Native

Marital Status: ___Married ___Single ___Divorced ___Widowed ___Separated ___Unmarried Couple

Citizenship: American Citizen? ___Yes ___Other
Explain "other" citizenship:

Veteran Status: ___No service ___General Discharge ___Active ___Disabled Veteran ___Honorable Discharge ___Dishonorable Discharge ___Medical Discharge

Other Names Used, or Alias: _____
Other ID #: _____
ID Type: _____

Hispanic: ___Yes ___No

# of Children currently residing in household: _____
# of Adults currently residing in household: _____
# of Children outside of household: _____

Daytime Phone: _____
Work Phone: _____
Comments: _____

What is client's most recent living situation? (Indicate living situation for the night prior to interview.)
For housing types with an asterisk: If a participant or family head(s) of household came from one of these facilities but were there less than 30 days and were living on the street or in an emergency shelter before entering the treatment facility, they should be counted in either the street or shelter category, as appropriate.
Note safety issues, develop safety plan, advise of resources, as needed.

___Streets ___Emergency Shelter ___Transitional Housing ___Substance Abuse Treatment/facility* ___Psychiatric Facility* ___Hospital* ___Jail/Prison * ___Living with relatives/Friends ___Own Home/ Rental Housing ___Fleeing Domestic Violence
Other: Comments:

Client's Most Recent Stable Address (Call 800.275.8777 to determine unknown zip codes for valid addresses):
Address: Apt#:
City: State: Zip:
Date Moved In: ____/_____ Date Moved Out: ____/_____
How long can the applicant remain at this location? _____
Landlord: Rent $: Subsidy $:
Reason for leaving: _____

Current Mailing Address: Apt. #:
City/State/Zip: _____/_____/_____

Precipitating Problems:
___Substance Abuse ___Child/Elder Abuse ___Natural Disaster ___Overcrowded
___Housing Issues ___Family breakup ___Relocation ___Incarceration ___Fire
___Income ___Medical Issues ___Mental Problems ___Lack of Job Skills ___Laid Off
___Domestic Violence ___Illness ___Identification ___Loss of Income
___Employment ___Neglect ___Eviction ___Stranded Traveler
Other: _____

Special Populations (or source of disability determination, which may be based on client report):
___Physical Disability ___Developmental Disability ___Medical ___Self Care Concerns
___Alcohol Abuse ___Domestic Violence ___Neglect ___Behavior Problems
___Drug Abuse ___Mental Illness ___Child/Elder Abuse ___Other:
___DSS Involvement ___APS Involvement ___CPS Involvement

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

I. Personal Information (Continued)

Other Agencies (working with client/applicant)

Agency	Contact name	Phone

Emergency Contact		Next Of Kin	
Name		Name	
Street Address		Street Address	
City/State/Zip		City/State/Zip	
Phone		Phone	
Relationship		Relationship	

II. Housing Information

Length of time client lived in Mecklenburg County: _____
Does client intend to remain in Mecklenburg County? ____ Yes ____ No
How often in the last 5 years has client/family been homeless: _____
Number of Evictions: _____ Please explain: _____
Has client/family previously lived in a group setting or group home? ____Yes ____No
Comments: _____

Has client ever been in foster care? ___Yes ___No *If "Yes", complete a, b and c below:*

a. How long in foster care
___Less than 6 months ___6 months – 1 year ___3 – 5 years
___1 – 2 years ___5 or more year

b. Circumstances under which client initially left foster care
___Aged out at age 18 ___Left placement without permission
___Custody was returned to family of origin ___Custody given to persons other than family of origin.
To whom? _____

c. Indicate all of the places that client has lived since leaving foster care:
___Family of Origin ___Residence in own name ___Streets ___Treatment facility
___Grand parents ___Friends ___Jail ___Mental institution
___Other relatives ___College ___Shelter ___Other (specify in comments)
Foster Care Comments: _____

Housing History (Use additional space as needed to document relevant housing history.)

Address: _____ Apt#: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Date Moved In: ____/_____ Date Moved Out: ____/_____
How long can the applicant remain at this location? _____
Landlord: _____ Rent $: _____ Subsidy $: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

Address: _____ Apt#: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Date Moved In: ____/_____ Date Moved Out: ____/_____
How long can the applicant remain at this location? _____
Landlord: _____ Rent $: _____ Subsidy $: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

Address: _____ Apt#: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Date Moved In: ____/_____ Date Moved Out: ____/_____
How long can the applicant remain at this location? _____
Landlord: _____ Rent $: _____ Subsidy $: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview **Name:** _____

III. Medical Information

Problem Date: _____ Diagnosis: _____
Current Treatment: ___Yes ___No Clinic/Hospital/Doctor: _____
Treatment Type: _____
Current Medication? ___Yes ___No
Medication Notes: _____

Self Report TB Symptoms (Check all that apply. If "Yes" to 2 or more, refer to TB Clinic @ 704.921.6170)

Symptom	Description	Yes	No
Unexplained productive cough	Cough greater than three weeks in duration		
Unexplained fever	Persistent temperature elevation greater than one month		
Night sweats	Persistent sweating that leaves sheets and bed clothes wet		
Shortness of breath/Chest pain	Presently having shortness of breath and chest pains		
Unexplained weight /appetite loss	Loss of appetite with unexplained weight loss		
Unexplained Fatigue	Very tired for no reason		

Pregnancy Information
Is client pregnant? ___Yes ___No Due Date: ____/____/____ Prenatal Care? ___Yes ___No
Clinic/Hospital/Doctor: _____
Treatment Type: _____ Medication? ___Yes ___No Meds/Dosage: _____
Comments: _____

Dental Information
Current Problem? ___Yes ___No Problem Notes: _____
Current Treatment? ___Yes ___No Clinic/Hospital/Doctor: _____
Treatment Type: _____ Medication? ___Yes ___No Meds/Dosage: _____

IV. Mental Health Information (View mental health screening before entering information and history.)

Is client currently receiving mental health services? ___Yes ___No
Problem Date: _____ Treatment Type: _____
Clinic/Hospital/Doctor: _____
Medication? ___Yes ___No Medication Last Use Date: _____
Medications/Dosage: _____
Description of problem, diagnosis if known: _____

Is client willing to receive assessment/treatment if recommended? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____

Previous Psychiatric Or Mental Health *Services* Or *Admissions*

Treatment Date	Description of problem, diagnosis, if known	Program/Clinic	Treatment Type (Inpatient / Outpatient)

Comments: _____

— Confidential Client Data —

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview **Name:** _____

V. Education and Occupational Skills / Employment

Level of Education: ___1-6 ___7-8 ___9 ___10 ___11 ___12
High School Diploma? ___Yes ___No GED? ___Yes ___No
College: _____ Degree? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____
Vocational Training ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____
Occupational Skills: _____
Machine Skills: _____
Computer Skills: _____

Current Employment

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Date of Next Paycheck: _____
Company Name: _____ Person to Contact: _____ Phone #: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Rate of Pay: _____ Hours Per week: _____
Job Title/Occupation: _____ Description of Duties: _____
Comments (include work schedule if needed): _____

Answer only if applicable:

…currently employed? ___Yes ___No ___N/A
…wants to be employed? ___Yes ___No ___N/A
…wants to receive job training? ___Yes ___No ___N/A
…underemployed? ___Yes ___No ___N/A

Previous Employment / History (Use additional page as needed to document relevant employment data.)

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Employment Type: ____Temporary ____Permanent
Company Name: _____ Person to Contact: _____ Phone #: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Rate of Pay: _____ Hours Per week: _____
Job Title/Occupation: _____ Description of Duties: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Employment Type: ____Temporary ____Permanent
Company Name: _____ Person to Contact: _____ Phone #: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Rate of Pay: _____ Hours Per week: _____
Job Title/Occupation: _____ Description of Duties: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Employment Type: ____Temporary ____Permanent
Company Name: _____ Person to Contact: _____ Phone #: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Rate of Pay: _____ Hours Per week: _____
Job Title/Occupation: _____ Description of Duties: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Employment Type: ____Temporary ____Permanent
Company Name: _____ Person to Contact: _____ Phone #: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Rate of Pay: _____ Hours Per week: _____
Job Title/Occupation: _____ Description of Duties: _____
Reason for leaving: _____

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

VI. Current And Past Drug And Alcohol Use (View drug/alcohol screening before entering information and history.)

Alcohol; Marijuana; Cocaine or Crack; Hallucinogens; Heroin; Prescription Drugs; Non-prescription Drugs; Methadone; Other psychoactive substances indicated/reported.

Substance	Frequency	Amount	Age of First Use	Date of Last Use	Amount of Last Use

Treatment

Current Treatment: ___ Treatment Type: ___Detox ___Outpatient ___Inpatient ___Residential ___Halfway ___Other_____

Current Clean Time:_____ Longest Clean Time:_____ Meetings or Aftercare: _____

Is client willing to receive assessment/treatment if recommended? ___Yes ___No

Comments: _____

Treatment History

Treatment Date	Description of problem, diagnosis, if known	Program/Clinic	Treatment Type (Inpatient / Outpatient)

VII. Current Legal Involvement And Legal History

Current legal involvement or court proceedings:

…As a defendant? ___Yes ___No …As a plaintiff? ___Yes ___No

…In civil court? ___Yes ___No …In criminal court? ___Yes ___No

Comments: _____

Restraining Order? ___Yes ___No

Comments: _____

Current Domestic Violence court proceedings? ___Yes ___No

Comments: _____

Sex Offender? ___Yes ___No ___Registered

Probation And Parole Information

Currently on probation or parole? ___Yes ___No Type: _____

Terms: _____

Officer:_____ County/State: _____/_____ Phone: _____

Date contacted: _____ Comments: _____

Arrest/ Convictions

Type M/F	Offense	Time Served	Arrest Date	Convicted?		Date Convicted	City/State/County
				Yes	No		
				Yes	No		
				Yes	No		
				Yes	No		

Notes: _____

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

VIII. FINANCIAL INFORMATION (Shaded and boxed areas are required; these fields must be completed.)

Combined Family Monthly Income		*Combined Family Monthly Expenses*	
Net Wages	$	Rent/Mortgage	$
AFDC/TANF	$	Electricity	$
Utility Allowance	$	Gas	$
Social Security: Old Age	$	Oil	$
Social Security: Survival	$	Water	$
Social Security: Disabled	$	Food	$
SSI	$	Child Care	$
Food Stamps	$	Phone	$
General Assistance	$	Car Payment	$
Veterans Benefits	$	Car Insurance	$
Retirement/Pension	$	Bus fare/Gas	$
Child Support/Alimony	$	Medical	$
Unemployment	$	Child Support	$
Other	$	Loans	$
Total	$	Other	$
		Total	$

Debt $_____ Credit: ___Good ___Fair ___Poor ___None Savings: $_____

Comments: _____

Outstanding Balances

Company	Outstanding Balance	Date Resolved
Duke Power		
Piedmont Natural Gas		

Comments: _____

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

VIII. FINANCIAL INFORMATION (Continued)

Emergency Financial Assistance

Agency	Date last used	Agency	Date last used
Crisis Assistance Ministry Emergency Financial Assistance		Community Link/ Travelers Aid	
Salvation Army Emergency Assistance		Other:	
DSS Emergency Assistance		Other:	

Current Assistance / Benefits / Subsidies (Required)

Fund	Receiving / Applied for	Date	Worker	Phone	Payee if SSI/SSDI	Disabling Condition
Food Stamps						
TANF						
Child Care Subsidy						
Work First Employment						
Medicare						
Medicaid						
Vocational Rehab						
SSI/SSDI						
Public Housing						
Section 8 Subsidy						
Shelter Plus Care						
City Within A City						
Other:						

Work First Information

Current TANF/Work First cash assistance (AFDC)? ___Yes ___No

If "No", has client received Work First benefits in the past? ___Yes ___No

If "Yes", under what circumstances did client leave Work First

___Became employed
___Used time limit
___Made too much money
___Sanctioned
___Terminated
___Other (specify): _____

Time Remaining: _____

Comments: _____

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

IX. Other Adult Household Members

Notes: Shaded and boxed areas are required; these fields must be completed.
Enter 000-00-000 if no social security number is available.
Enter estimated birth date if unknown (use January 1st and an approximate year, i.e. 01/01/1960).
A separate page must completed for each household adult other than the primary applicant (make additional copies of this page as needed).

First Name: Last Name:

Social Security: Date of Birth: / / Age: Gender: ___Male ___Female

Race: ___Bi-racial ___Black/African-American ___Caucasian ___Pacific Island/Asian ___Native American/Alaskan Native

Marital Status: ___Married ___Single ___Divorced ___Widowed ___Separated ___Unmarried Couple

Citizenship: American Citizen? ___Yes ___Other
Explain "other" citizenship: _____

Veteran Status: ___No service ___General Discharge ___Active ___Disabled Veteran ___Honorable Discharge ___Dishonorable Discharge ___Medical Discharge

Hispanic: ___Yes ___No

Relationship to client/family: _____

Has Adult ever been in foster care? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____
Has Adult ever lived in a group setting? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____

Special Considerations:
___Physical Disability ___Domestic Violence ___Mental illness ___DSS Involvement
___Medical ___Self Care concerns ___Alcohol Abuse ___Drug Abuse ___APS Involvement
___Neglect ___Child/Elder abuse ___Behavior Problems ___Developmental Disorder

Medical Problems:
Diagnosis: _____
Clinic/physician: _____ Phone: _____
Medications: _____ Physical Needs: _____

Employment Information:
Last or Current Employer: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____ City/State: _____ Zip: _____
From: _____ To: _____ Supervisor: _____
Job Title: _____ Hourly Pay: _____ Hrs Per week: _____ Next Pay Day: _____
If Unemployed, for what reason: _____

Education: Highest education completed: _____ Comments: _____
Vocational training: _____

Current Substance Abuse/Substance Abuse History:
Drugs currently used: _____
Date last used: _____ Comment: _____

Legal problems:
Current/Past charges: _____
On Probation or Parole: _____ Probation Officer: _____
Address: _____ Phone: _____
Term of Probation/ Parole: _____

Mental Health:
History of Psychiatric Problems: _____ Diagnosis: _____
Clinic/Hospital: _____ Physician/Counselor: _____
Comments _____

X. Minor Children Information

Notes: Shaded and boxed areas are required; these fields **must** be completed.
Enter 000-00-000 if no social security number is available.
Enter estimated birth date if unknown (use January 1st and an approximate year, i.e. 01/01/1960).
A separate page must completed for **each** child, in or out of household (make additional copies of this page as needed).

First Name: Last Name:

Social Security: / / Date of Birth: / / Age: Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Race: ___Bi-racial ___Black/African-American
___Caucasian ___Pacific Island/Asian
___Native American/Alaskan Native

Hispanic: ___ Yes ___ No

Relationship to client/family:

Has Child ever been in foster care? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____
Has Child ever lived in a group setting? ___Yes ___No
Comments: _____
If not admitted to agency, child ____would definitely ____possibly ____would not be placed in foster care.

Custody:
Who has legal custody? Name: _____ Relationship: _____
Comments: _____
Who has physical custody? Name: _____ Relationship: _____
Comments: _____

School: _____ Grade Level: _____ County: _____
Street Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Day Care:
___In Day Care ___Day Care Needed ___In Before/After School Care ___Before/After School Care Needed
Comments: _____

- If child is receiving services from Child Care Resources, indicate so under **Financial Information, Current Assistance/Benefits/ Subsidies.**

Special Considerations:
_____Handicapped _____Domestic Violence _____Behavioral Problems _____Current CPS Involvement
_____Self Care Concerns _____Exceptional Children Services In School Setting
_____Neglect: Reported To: _____ Date: _____ Reported By: _____
_____Abuse: Reported To: _____ Date: _____ Reported By: _____
_____Other: _____

Notes: _____

--- *Confidential Client Data* ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview **Name:** _____

XI. AGENCY REFERRALS

Assessor: _____

Agency: _____

Hard copy on file at: _____

Date of Initial Assessment: ____/____/____

Release of Information: ____Yes ____No

Referrals:

To	By	Date	Agency
			A CHILD'S PLACE
			ACCESS
			BATTERED WOMEN SHELTER
			BELMONT NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER
			BETHLEHEM CENTER
			BRIDGE JOB PROGRAM
			CAROLINA MEDICAL CENTER
			CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES
			CENTRAL PIEDMONT COLLEGE, ABLE, GED, DENTAL CLINIC
			CHARLOTTE AREA FUND
			CEH - CHARLOTTE EMERGENCY HOUSING
			CHA - CHARLOTTE HOUSING AUTHORITTY
			CHARLOTTE PREGNANCY CENTER
			CHARLOTTE REGIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
			CHARLOTTE RESCUE MISSON
			CDC - CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY CENTER
			CCRI
			CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT
			COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS
			COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSOCIATION
			COMMUNITY KITCHEN
			COMMUNITY LINK/TRAVELER'S AID
			CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING
			COUNTY AREA MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCES ABUSE SVCS.
			CRISIS ASSISTANCE MINISTRY
			DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
			DETOX
			ECO ENERGY COMMITTED TO OFFENDERS
			EQUIFAX
			EMERGENCY WINTER SHELTER
			EMPLOYMENT SECURITY COMMISSION/JOB LINK
			FAMILY CENTER
			FIGHTING BACK
			FLORENCE CRITTENTON SERVICES
			GOOD FELLOWS
			GOOD FRIENDS
			GOODWILL INDUSTRIES
			HEALTH DEPARTMENT
			HISPANIC PROGRAM (Program Esperanza)
			HOMELESS SUPPORT SERVICES ASSESSOR
			HOPE HAVEN
			JACKSON PARK MINISTRIES
			JACOBS LADDER
			LEGAL SERVICES
			LOAVES AND FISHES
			MECKLENBURG COUNTY WOMEN'S COMMISSION
			MCLEOD CENTER
			METROLINA AIDS PROJECT (MAP)
			NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER
			NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF CHARLOTTE
			NOVA (NEW OPTIONS FOR VIOLENT ACTIONS)
			POLICE DEPT
			PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL
			PROGRAMS FOR ACCESSIBLE LIVING
			REALTORS
			THE RELATIVES/YOUTH NETWORK
			RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT SERVICES
			SALVATION ARMY WOMENS SHELTER
			SALVATION ARMY MENS REHABILITATION ARC
			SCHOOL SYSTEM
			SELF REFERRAL

--- Confidential Client Data ---

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview Name: _____

To	By	Date	Agency
			SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
			SHELTER MEDICAL/DENTAL CLINIC
			SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
			STREET OUTREACH WORKER
			SUCCESS BY SIX
			SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION CITY OF CHARLOTTE
			SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION COUNTY OF MECKLENBURG
			SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION AMERICAN RED CROSS AND OTHER RED CROSS SERVICES
			TOTAL CARE OF CAROLINAS
			UJAMMA
			UPTOWN MEN'S SHELTER
			URBAN MINISTRIES
			UNITED FAMILY SERVICES
			US IMMIGRATION SERVICES
			VICTIM ASSISTANCE
			VETERAN'S SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
			VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
			WIC FOOD AND NUTRITION
			YWCA/WOMEN IN TRANSITION PROGRAM
			OTHER:
			OTHER:
			OTHER:
			OTHER:
			OTHER:
			OTHER:

Assessment History:

Date	Assessor	Agency	Notes
			Goals:
			Summary:
			Action Plan:
			Client signature: Date:

Use additional pages if needed.

HSN THREADS/COS Initial Assessment Interview **Name:** _____

XII. COS REFERRAL NARRATIVE

The following questions should be addressed for referral for case management services through the Coordination of Services committee.

Length of time applicant/family has worked with referring agency: _____

1. Applicant/family's goals: _____
2. Applicant/family's strengths: _____
3. Areas for growth: _____
4. Presenting problems and factors contributing to homelessness: _____
5. Indicators of motivation and readiness for change: _____
6. Barriers to self-sufficiency and/or independent living: _____
7. Areas to be addressed in case management: _____
8. Goals applicant/family might achieve through participation in transitional/supportive housing program: _____
9. Potential or anticipated problems in transitional/supportive housing: _____
10. Applicant/family's current and/or previous experience with social services and case management: _____

ACTION PLAN

Service Needs:

____Food	____Housing	____Medical
____Clothing	____Rent/Mortgage	____Dental
____Water	____Budgeting	____Mental Health
____Electric	____Legal	____Furniture
____Gas	____Employment	____Uniforms
____Other	____Other	____Other

I agree to work on the following goals in order to meet the service needs checked above:

Target Date

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Specific Tasks and Responsibilities:

What you and your family advocate need to do to meet the goals listed above:

Goal #	Task	Who is responsible	Target date

_____ _____

Client Signature Date Family Advocate Signature Date

(8/00) Phone Number: